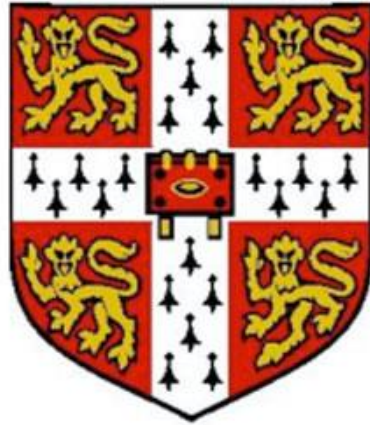


# **Building the ‘Sri Lankan nation’ through education: The identity politics of teaching history in a multicultural post-war society**



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**Dissertation Title:** Building the ‘Sri Lankan nation’ through education: The identity politics of teaching history in a multicultural post-war society

## **Abstract**

Driven by the overarching objective of promoting reconciliation through education, this thesis strives to unpack the first national goal of education set out by the Sri Lankan Ministry of Education, which involves nation building and the establishment of a Sri Lankan identity through the promotion of social cohesion and the recognition of cultural diversity in Sri Lanka’s plural society. Within education, history teaching in secondary school acts as the main focus of the research, due to the relevance of this goal to the subject of history as well as the ability of history to shape the attitudes and perceptions of youth. As such, the original contribution of this thesis is the development of an understanding of how the goal of nation building is being carried out through the Sri Lankan education system by focusing on the subject of history, which in turn facilitates an analysis of the identity politics of teaching history in a multicultural post-war society. With the intention of developing such an understanding, the study aims to answer three research questions: 1) What type of nation is being built through history education in Sri Lanka?; 2) How is the ethnic and religious diversity which characterises the Sri Lankan nation being dealt with through history education?; and 3) How are Sri Lankan youth being aided in understanding the sensitive matters which impeded the nation building exercise in the recent past and resulted in the break out of the ethnic conflict?

The thesis draws on an inductive approach, using qualitative research and secondary literature. Findings are generated from field work and textbook analysis. Conducted in four different districts around the country chosen based on their ethnic and religious compositions, field work involves the conducting of interviews with youth, history teachers, curriculum developers, textbook writers and other academics.

This thesis argues that an ambiguity regarding the composition of the ‘Sri Lankan nation’ is being created through history education, with it sometimes being characterised as a purely Sinhalese-Buddhist nation instead of a multicultural one. This is most likely because the prominent players involved in the development of the curriculum themselves appear to be conflicted about the monoethnic versus polyethnic nature of the nation, with their views filtering through to the educational materials they produce.

It is evident that the history curriculum predominantly contains Sinhalese-Buddhist history, with little information being conveyed about the history of the minority groups. Tamils and Muslims are portrayed as invaders and outsiders since the national story is narrated through the perspective of the Sinhalese-Buddhist community who play the role of the protagonist. With respect to stakeholder reactions, there appears to be a contrast in the attitudes of Tamil and Muslim youth regarding the portrayal of minority history, with Tamils being vocal about their anger towards the perceived bias, but Muslims being reluctant to discuss ethnic matters, preferring to sweep them under the rug.

Finally, in terms of the ethnically sensitive matters in recent history, while some are completely omitted from the history lessons, others are narrated through a majoritarian perspective or glossed over by leaving out key pieces of information. Youth are therefore largely unaware of the contentious matters that led to the breakdown of ethnic relations in the country, despite having lived through a brutal ethnic conflict.

These findings indicate the failings of the nation building exercise being carried out through history education. Instead of building a strong Sri Lankan identity, this type of education is creating confusion regarding the composition of the nation and adversely affecting the sense of belonging of minority youth. It is also creating a younger generation who are unaware of their country's past troubles. The recent spate of ethnic and religious violence that shook the nation highlight the need to address these weaknesses in a timely manner, with a view to promoting reconciliation through education.

This thesis is dedicated to Giulio Regeni, a true inspiration and an even truer friend.



## Declaration

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the Politics and International Studies Degree Committee.

Mihiri Warnasuriya

Cambridge

28 August 2018





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Next, I have to say a big thank you to my amazing family for their continuous love and support. I fondly remember my father who is no longer with us, for being a quiet but vital presence in my life. I thank my mother and sister for being my ‘go to’ people for anything and everything, and for laughing and crying along with me throughout the ups and downs of the PhD experience. I’m also grateful to my mother for assisting with my research by accompanying me on fieldwork trips, finding useful contacts and proofreading my work. Overall, my parents, my brother and sister-in-law and sister and brother-in-law, not to mention my adorable nephew and niece, were the best support system I could have asked for. Their warmth, generosity and humour got me through many a hard time.

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# Table of Contents

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>List of tables, figures and appendices .....</b>	<b>xi</b>
<b>List of acronyms.....</b>	<b>xiii</b>
<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. Background and rationale.....	1
1.2. Research questions and objective.....	14
1.3. Structure of the thesis.....	15
<b>2. Literature review .....</b>	<b>17</b>
2.1. Education and conflict.....	17
2.2. History education in plural societies .....	21
2.3. Concepts of identity .....	39
2.4. Nation building through education.....	44
<b>3. Research methodology.....</b>	<b>50</b>
3.1. Conceptual framework .....	50
3.2. Overview of research questions and objective .....	54
3.3. Overall research approach .....	54
3.4. Data collection procedures .....	56
3.5. Data analysis procedures.....	68
<b>4. History education and ambiguity of the ‘Sri Lankan nation’ .....</b>	<b>75</b>
4.1. Nation building through education.....	75
4.2. The Sri Lankan nation versus the Sinhalese-Buddhist nation.....	79
4.3. National and ethnic affiliations of youth.....	91
<b>5. The recognition of diversity through history education.....</b>	<b>94</b>
5.1. Portrayal of ethnic groups .....	94
5.2. Reactions to culturally sensitive material.....	119
<b>6. The handling of sensitive matters in modern Sri Lankan history .....</b>	<b>133</b>
6.1. The sensitive matters and their place in the history textbooks.....	133
6.2. Youth understanding of the sensitive matters .....	139
6.3. Educational stakeholder opinions on the handling of sensitive matters through history education .....	153

6.4. Theoretical perspectives and related research .....	160
7. Conclusion .....	165
7.1. Summary of findings.....	165
7.2. Overall implications of the results .....	173
7.3. Directions for future research.....	175
<b>References</b> .....	178
<b>Glossary</b> .....	192
<b>Appendices</b> .....	194

# List of tables, figures and appendices

## Tables

Table 1: Population distribution by ethnicity, 1981	2
Table 2: Population distribution by ethnicity 2012	2
Table 3: Population distribution by religion, 1981	3
Table 4: Population distribution by religion, 2012	3
Table 5: Types of schools in Sri Lanka	10
Table 6: Government schools by medium of instruction and province	11
Table 7: Ethnic compositions of the population in the districts chosen for fieldwork	57
Table 8: Religious compositions of the population in the districts chosen for fieldwork	57
Table 9: Ethnic and religious backgrounds of youth participants in the study	59
Table 10: Ethnic and religious backgrounds of history teachers in the study	62
Table 11: Selection of history textbook chapters for analysis	70
Table 12: Responses of youth from the Matara district	99
Table 13: Responses of youth from the Mullaitivu district	102
Table 14: Responses of youth from the Ampara district	105
Table 15: Responses of youth from the Colombo district	107
Table 16: Responses of youth from all four districts	111
Table 17: Classification of youth responses regarding the causes of the conflict	137

## Figures

Figure 1: Population distribution by ethnicity, 1981	2
Figure 2: Population distribution by ethnicity, 2012	3
Figure 3: Population distribution by religion, 1981	4
Figure 4: Population distribution by religion, 2012	4
Figure 5: Data collection activities	56

## **Appendices**

Appendix A: List of interview participants	192
Appendix B: Semi-structured interview guide – Students	195
Appendix C: Semi-structured interview guide – History teachers	197
Appendix D: Semi-structured interview guide – Content creators	199
Appendix E: Semi-structured interview guide – Academics	201
Appendix F: Informed consent form	203
Appendix G: Code lists	204
Appendix H: Network diagram	209
Appendix I: Query report	210
Appendix J: Cross tabulation table – Youth nationality data	211

## **List of acronyms**

ACTC	All Ceylon Tamil Congress
BBS	Bodu Bala Sena
CAQDAS	Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis
EPD	Educational Publications Department
GCE O/L	General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level
GCE A/L	General Certificate of Education Advanced Level
KDU	General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MBO	Multiple Textbook Option
MRG	Minority Rights Group International
NCEASL	National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka
NEC	National Education Commission
NIE	National Institute of Education
ONUR	Office for National Unity and Reconciliation
SLMC	Sri Lanka Muslim Congress
SLU	Sri Lanka Unites
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VAT	Value Added Tax

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Background and rationale

The year 2009 has gone down in history as the year Sri Lanka became a post-war country, emerging from a 26-year long armed conflict. It is difficult to articulate just what it means for a country to experience such a long drawn out war. Attempting to describe at least some of its consequences, Thiranagama (2011, p. 2) writes,

It is a war that has involved the destruction of physical and human infrastructures, the permanent displacement of hundreds of thousands of people, the pitting of majority against minority ethnic groups, and the rise of insurrectionary groups who have turned from “heroes” to oppressors.

To capture the gravity of the war in purely numerical terms, the violence claimed over 100,000 lives (United Nations, 2012), and displaced more than one million people (International Crisis Group, 2006). Although when stripped down to its core, it was a war between a state and a terrorist organisation, the effects it generated seeped into every aspect of the social, economic and cultural lives of the country’s citizens, ensuring that not a single Sri Lankan was immune from its impact. Illuminating how this can affect the very fabric of society in his moving work titled *This divided island: Stories from the Sri Lankan war*, Subramanian (2015, p. 2) eloquently states that he went to Sri Lanka to discover “what the conflict had done to the country’s soul.”

There is no doubt that the end of the war has been a massive relief to the entire Sri Lankan population, who can now send their children to school without worrying for their safety or utilise public transport without eyeing their fellow passengers suspiciously. However, it is also undeniable that the war has left lasting scars on the Sri Lankan society, since despite the cessation of armed violence, the underlying ethnic and religious tensions of the conflict remain.<sup>1</sup> The government that was in power when the war ended claimed that the country never had ethnic challenges, but rather suffered from a terrorist problem which was overcome through superior military force (Ruwanpura, 2016). Their claim has proved to be false. As Bastian (2013) explains, gaining control over the entire geographical landscape of the island

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<sup>1</sup> The ethnically sensitive matters which led up to the break out of violence will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6.



through military prowess does not guarantee a political solution to the continuing communal grievances. As such he makes a distinction between a ‘post-war’ country and a ‘post-conflict’ country, bestowing the former, and not the latter label upon Sri Lanka. Thus, in the aftermath of the war, the local context has remained volatile and uncertain (Arambewela and Arambewela, 2010). As one type of violence has abated another type has emerged in the form of riots and attacks among members of the general public over religious and ethnic agitations. In order to understand these disputes, it is necessary to start by looking at the composition of the country in terms of ethnicity and religion.

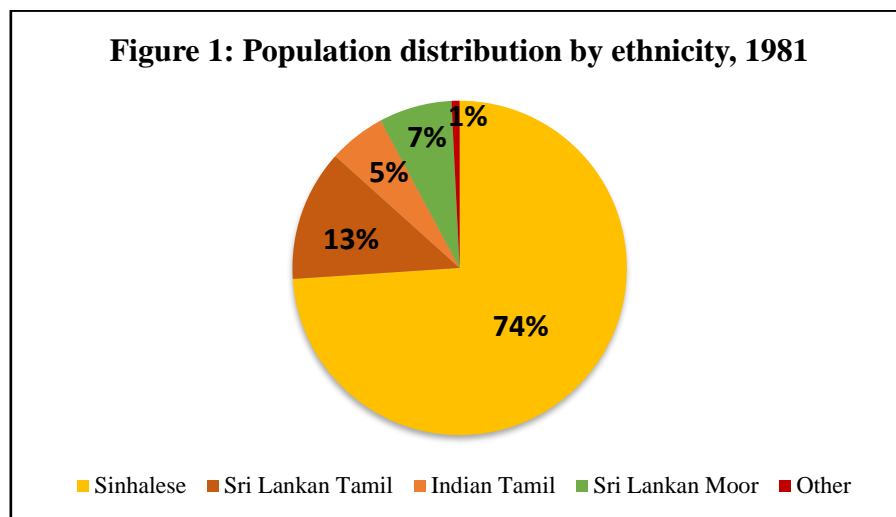
**Table 1: Population distribution  
by ethnicity, 1981**

Ethnic group	Quantity	%
Sinhalese	10,979,568	73.9
Sri Lankan Tamil <sup>2</sup>	1,886,864	12.7
Indian Tamil <sup>3</sup>	818,656	5.5
Sri Lankan Moor <sup>4</sup>	1,046,927	7.1
Other	115,735	0.8
Total	14,847,750	100.0

**Table 2: Population distribution  
by ethnicity, 2012**

Ethnic group	Quantity	%
Sinhalese	15,250,081	74.9
Sri Lankan Tamil	2,269,266	11.1
Indian Tamil	839,504	4.1
Sri Lankan Moor	1,892,638	9.3
Other	107,950	0.5
Total	20,359,439	100.0

Source: (Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka, 2015b)

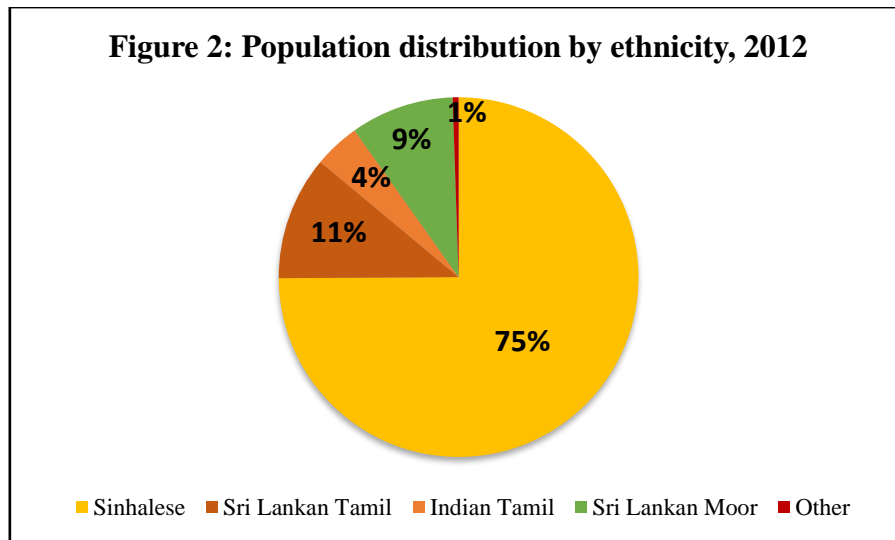


Source: (Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka, 2015b)

<sup>2</sup> Sri Lankan Tamils are believed to be descendants of Dravidians from South India who arrived in the island in ancient times.

<sup>3</sup> Indian Tamils, also known as ‘Estate Tamils’ or ‘Upcountry Tamils’ are the descendants of indentured workers brought down by the British in the colonial period to work on tea, coffee and rubber plantations.

<sup>4</sup> Sri Lankan Moors are colloquially referred to as Muslims. The latter term will be used for this ethnic group throughout the thesis.



Source: (Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka, 2015b)

As shown in tables 1 and 2 and figures 1 and 2<sup>5</sup> above, the composition of the population in terms of ethnicity has not changed considerably over the last few decades. The Sinhalese majority have slightly increased their population share from 73.9 percent in 1981 to 74.9 percent in 2012. Sri Lankan Tamils have maintained their position as the largest minority despite their population share decreasing from 12.7 percent in 1981 to 11.1 percent in 2012. The proportion of Indian Tamils too has slightly fallen from 5.5 percent in 1981 to 4.1 percent in 2012. The second largest minority, the Muslims, on the other hand have increased their population share to 9.3 percent in 2012 from 7.1 percent in 1981. The other smaller minorities such as Burghers<sup>6</sup> have accounted for less than one percent of the population in both periods.

**Table 3: Population distribution  
by religion, 1981**

Religion	Quantity	%
Buddhist	10,288,328	69.3
Hindu	2,297,806	15.5
Islam	1,121,715	7.6
Roman Catholic & Christian	1,130,567	7.6
Other	8,334	0.1
Total	14846750	100

**Table 4: Population distribution  
by religion, 2012**

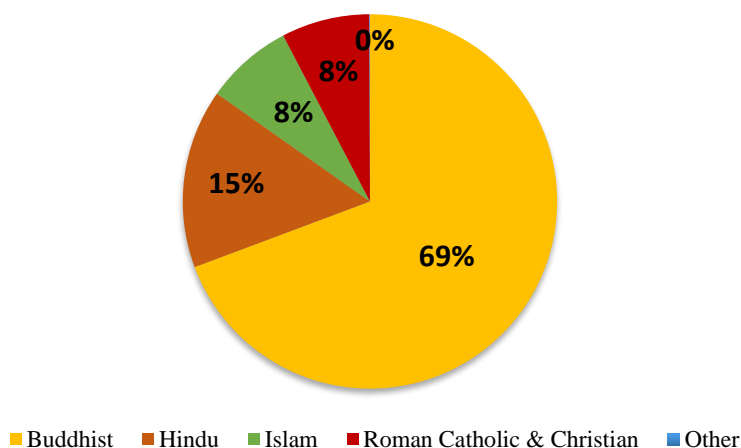
Religion	Quantity	%
Buddhist	14,272,056	70.1
Hindu	2,561,299	12.6
Islam	1,967,523	9.7
Roman Catholic & Christian	1,552,161	7.6
Other	6,400	0.0
Total	20359439	100

Source: (Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka, 2015b)

<sup>5</sup> The colours used in the charts are the same as those that appear in the Sri Lankan flag to represent the minorities: orange for Tamils, green for Muslims and maroon for other minority faiths and ethnicities.

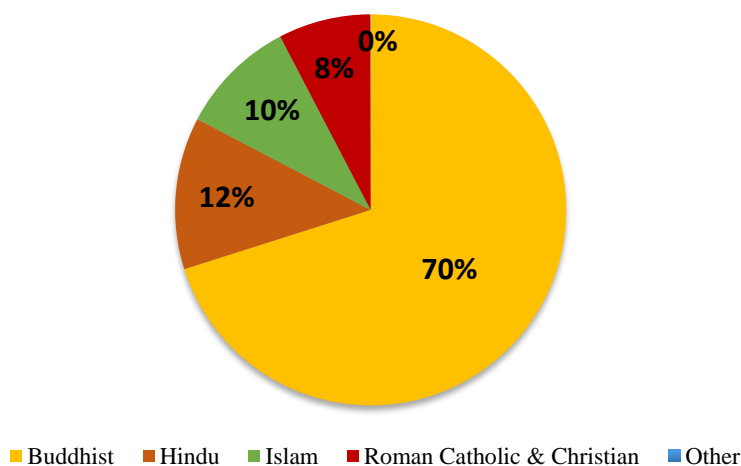
<sup>6</sup> Burghers are descendants of the Portuguese, Dutch and British who settled in Sri Lanka in the colonial period.

**Figure 3: Population distribution by religion, 1981**



Source: (Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka, 2015b)

**Figure 4: Population distribution by religion, 2012**



Source: (Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka, 2015b)

In terms of religion, while most Sinhalese are Buddhists and the rest are Christians, Tamils too are either Hindus or Christians<sup>7</sup>. The total share of Buddhists has experienced a slight increase from 69.3 percent in 1981 to 70.1 percent in 2012. Following the trend of the overall Tamil population, the proportion of Hindus has decreased from 15.5 percent in 1981 to 12.6 percent in 2012. The share of Muslims however has increased to 9.7 percent in 2012 from 7.6 percent in 1981. The share of Christians and adherents of other religions meanwhile, has remained the same.

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<sup>7</sup> Roman Catholics, Protestants and members of other denominations are collectively referred to as Christians in this thesis.

Although these distinct ethnicities and religions exist in Sri Lanka, Smock (2008) and Venugopal (cited in Stewart, 2009) note that the boundary between the two is hazy, with ethnicity and religion often overlapping. As such, the country has seen pure ethnic and religious identities being overshadowed by ‘ethno-religious’ identity (Gunatilleke, 2018). As Gunatilleke explains, the groups that have emerged include Sinhalese-Buddhists, Hindus who are ethnic Tamils, Muslims who are followers of Islam, and Christians who belong to the Sinhalese, Tamil and Burgher ethnic groups. Understanding these compound identities is a pre-requisite to understanding the causes and complexities of the communal violence that continues to impede Sri Lankan development.

Before delving into the discussion regarding this communal violence, it is useful to clarify some of the terms used in this thesis to describe the diversity that characterises the Sri Lankan nation. Sri Lanka is a multicultural country. “As a descriptive term, multiculturalism refers to the coexistence of people with many cultural identities in a common state, society, or community” (Calhoun, 2002).<sup>8</sup> Calhoun goes on to explain that the prescriptive form of the term advocates that different groups should sustain their distinctive cultures whilst living together in one society with mutual tolerance and respect. It should be noted that the term ‘multicultural’ is used in its descriptive rather than prescriptive sense within this thesis. Sri Lanka can also be described as a plural society, which implies that it is “composed of multiple ethnic, racial, religious, national, tribal, and/or linguistic groups that retain their cultural identities and social networks but participate in shared political and economic systems” (Calhoun, 2002).<sup>9</sup> These two terms as well as the synonymous term ‘diverse’ are used throughout the thesis when referring to the Sri Lankan society.

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<sup>8</sup> This quotation is taken from the online publication of the Dictionary of the Social Sciences edited by Craig Calhoun (2002), and thus does not contain a page number. It can be found at: <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195123715.001.0001/acref-9780195123715-e-1123?rskey=xZt9mA&result=1122>

<sup>9</sup> Refer footnote 8 above. This definition can be found at: <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195123715.001.0001/acref-9780195123715-e-1272?rskey=a6kBIk&result=1261>

### *Post-war ethno-religious conflict in Sri Lanka<sup>10</sup>*

Starting from civil unrest and riots in the early 1980s, the Sri Lankan civil war which progressed into a full-fledged armed conflict between the Sinhalese majority government and a Tamil separatist group called the ‘Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam’ (LTTE), was generally known as a war between Sinhalese and Tamils<sup>11</sup>. Once the war ended, the animosity which Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalists portrayed towards those who were pursuing a similar form of Tamil nationalism, was redirected towards the Muslim and Christian populations (Gunatilleke, 2015). The resulting communal violence took various forms. A categorization of it can be found in a study by the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) which is as follows: 1) physical violence, 2) destruction of property, 3) intimidation, threat or coercion, 4) hate campaigns or propaganda, and 5) discriminatory practice (Gunatilleke, 2015).

As Gunatilleke (2015) explains, two national non-governmental bodies in Sri Lanka, namely the Secretariat for Muslims and the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL) gather and publish data on the actual incidence of communal violence. According to their findings, there were 241 and 200 anti-Muslim attacks in 2013 and 2014 respectively, as well as 69 and 88 anti-Christian attacks during the same years. A change of government in 2015 brought with it the hope that the violence would abate to a certain extent. This proved to be true with respect to the incidents of acute violence against the Muslim population. However, chronic violence against the same group continued, with the Secretariat for Muslims reporting 82 incidents between January and September 2015 and the Minority Rights Group International (MRG) reporting 64 incidents between November 2015 and June 2016. Similarly, violence against the Christian community also remained persistent, with the NCEASL reporting 190 attacks against churches, clergy and Christians in May 2017 following the election of the new administration in January 2015 (Gunatilleke, 2018).

Turning to the underlying causes behind the ongoing ethno-religious conflict, Gunatilleke (2015, 2018) identifies three different fault lines – socio-cultural, economic and political. The socio-cultural dimension stems from historical legends transmitted through formal education

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<sup>10</sup> This section relies heavily on two reports authored by Gunatilleke and published by the International Centre for Ethnic Studies and Equitas – International Centre for Human Rights Education as a component of their *Promoting religious harmony project*. These reports are two of the few publications that collate and present the scarce data that has been generated on the incidence of communal violence in Sri Lanka in recent times.

<sup>11</sup> Those who are referred to in this context are Sri Lankan Tamils who are predominantly located in the Northern parts of the island. In general, the term ‘Tamils’ is used to collectively refer to both Sri Lankan and Indian Tamils together or else to simply refer to Sri Lankan Tamils alone.

and informal sources, which stabilise Sinhalese-Buddhist entitlement claims on the ownership of the country and relegate minorities to the peripheries as ‘outsiders’.<sup>12</sup> The high population growth of Muslims and the proliferation of Christianity threaten this host mentality<sup>13</sup> of Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalists, thereby incurring their wrath. Meanwhile economic rivalries between these groups are based on a sense of jealousy of the business acumen of Muslims which earns them a large share of economic gains, and this has been exacerbated by market reforms which no longer favour advantaged groups<sup>14</sup> and the failure to gain from post-war economic dividends. With respect to the political fault lines, the politicisation of ethno-religious identities can be seen due to the rise of ultra nationalist political parties such as the Jathika Hela Urumaya. The positive reception enjoyed by these parties has led mainstream parties to jump on the band wagon by either forming coalitions with the former or by adapting their stances to run along more nationalistic lines. In addition, other extremist and often militant ethno-nationalist groups such as the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS)<sup>15</sup>, Sinhala Ravaya and Ravana Balaya have also emerged, spurred on by the political patronage that has been extended to them.<sup>16</sup>

One method through which these extremist groups have galvanised the support of the general public is the staging of hate campaigns. The largest hate campaign the post-war period has witnessed for instance, is the ‘Sinha Le’ movement. As Gunatilleke (2018) explains, the movement gets its name from the legend of Sinha Bahu, whom the Sinhalese are said to be descendants of, and who is believed to have been conceived through the union between a woman and a lion. As such, Sinha Le refers to lion’s blood or Sinhalese blood. The main premise of the movement is based on the purity of Sinhalese blood, which places non-Sinhalese, particularly Muslims, in the impure category. Spray painting the words Sinha Le on the walls of Muslim houses as well as the spread of Sinha Le bumper stickers and graffiti throughout Colombo and its suburbs are examples of the manifestations of hate incited by this campaign. Additionally, social media too has been bombarded by false historical propaganda

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<sup>12</sup> Also see (Gunawardana, 1995; Perera, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> This refers to the attitude that as the first settlers on the island, Sinhala-Buddhists are the generous hosts of Sri Lanka, who treat the guest minorities well (Verité Research, 2013). As further explained by Verité Research (2013, p. 2) “This translates to sentiments that advise the minorities to recognise the graciousness of the hosts, and not to over-step their limits.”

<sup>14</sup> See (Gunasinghe, 2004).

<sup>15</sup> The literal translation of this name is ‘Buddhist Power Army’.

<sup>16</sup> Also see (Verite Research and The Asia Foundation, 2016).

and messages of intolerance, by proponents of this movement as well as by the supporters of the other extremist groups.

### *The need for reconciliation*

Although the need for reconciliation was not recognised by the Mahinda Rajapakse government that was in power when the war ended, the continued spread of communal violence has led to an acknowledgement of its value by the new government that was installed in 2015. This refers not just to the relationships between the Sinhalese and Tamils, but to reconciliation between all ethnic and religious communities in the country (Arambewela and Arambewela, 2010). As De Mel and Venugopal (2016) maintain, reconciliation “involves forging trust, connections and cohesion among people divided by a long legacy of ethnic conflict.” Given that the Sri Lankan conflict centred around state society relations, Bastian (2013) adds that the reorganisation of the state to make room for plural identities is a vital part of reconciliation.

To date several measures have been taken to further the process of reconciliation. These include adopting the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment to the constitution which recognises the promotion of reconciliation and national integration as duties of the president; co-sponsoring a US-led resolution titled ‘Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka’; operationalising the Permanent Office on Missing Persons; setting up the Office for National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR) to lead reconciliation processes; operationalising the Right to Information Act; drafting legislation on a Truth and Reconciliation Commission; launching the National Policy on Reconciliation of the Government of Sri Lanka; and taking symbolic steps to promote equality such as singing the national anthem in both the Sinhalese and Tamil languages, adopting a Declaration of Peace on Independence Day in February 2015, and observing National Integration and Reconciliation Week annually.

### The role of education

This wide-ranging assortment of measures taken show that reconciliation can be pursued in various ways. This thesis argues that one avenue that needs to be looked at further, which can have long lasting effects, is education. This is particularly true given the active involvement of educated youth in instigating and propagating violence and hate through social media. The proliferation of many of the false historical claims made by extremist nationalist groups as well as the organisation of violent attacks for instance, were done through the use of social media

and messaging platforms. In fact, following some incidents of violence against Muslims in March 2018, the government was even compelled to impose temporary emergency restrictions on the use of social media, in order to curb the spread of hate and protect the affected communities. Reiterating the argument regarding the involvement of educated youth, since computer literacy rates in the country are highest among youth and among those who are in the highest educational attainment category<sup>17</sup>, much of this hate inducing social media activity can be attributed to the educated younger generation.

This brings up the need to investigate whether weaknesses in the education system could be some of the causative factors behind the prolonged conflict in the country. As Davies (2004, p.5) holds, analysis of the link between education and conflict is imperative since certain aspects of the school system could inculcate “a lifelong predisposition to hostility.” Conversely, education could also be used to instil values of tolerance and harmony in children from a young age. This ability it possesses of influencing mindsets makes education essential for reconciliation and the prevention of further conflict. Furthermore, the formal education system moulds a country’s values, ethics and social institutions, including student perceptions of ethnic and religious diversity (World Bank, 2011). The World Bank claims that policy makers from the 1990s onwards have acknowledged the need to shape the education system in a way that would enable it to promote social cohesion and national integration among youth. Before delving into the wider discussion of how this can or is being done, it is important to first paint a clear picture of the education system in Sri Lanka. This task is taken up in the next section.

#### *An overview of the Sri Lankan education system*

Education in the island has a history that spans over 2000 years and the literacy rate of the Sri Lankan population of 93.1 percent in 2016 (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2018) is among the highest in South Asia. With education being mentioned as a fundamental right in the country’s constitution, schooling is compulsory for children from age 5 – 14. General education which covers primary and secondary education, has a span of 13 years duration from age 5 to 18. The state plays an important role in education, with free education being provided from the primary

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<sup>17</sup> In the first half of 2017 youth in the 15 – 19 age group showed the highest computer literacy rate (60.7%), followed by the 20 – 24 age group (55.1%) and the 25 – 29 age group (45.8%). With respect to educational attainment, the computer literacy rate was highest among those who were educated up to GCE A/L and above (71.2%) followed by those who were educated up to GCE O/L (42.4%) (Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka, 2017).



stage to the first degree level of university since 1947. (Ministry of Education - Sri Lanka, 2013). As shown in the table below, 90 percent of the total number of schools in the country are government schools (Ministry of Education - Sri Lanka, 2018) .

**Table 5: Types of schools in Sri Lanka**

Type of school	Number of schools
Government schools	10,194
Private schools	80
Special schools	26
Pirivenas	753
International schools	265
Total	11,318

Source: (Ministry of Education - Sri Lanka, 2018)

The education structure consists of five parts: primary (grade 1 – 5), junior secondary (grade 6 – 9), senior secondary (grade 10 – 11), collegiate (grade 12 – 13) and tertiary. The students of government schools and pirivenas sit the national public examinations, as do a proportion of students from private schools. The remainder of students from private schools and those from international schools face overseas examinations (Widanapathirana *et al.*, 2016). The General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level (GCE O/L) is the first national public examination and it is conducted at the end of grade 11. Those who successfully get through this examination have the option of moving on to the next stage of general education or shifting to vocational training and technical education. The General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (GCE A/L) examination is conducted at the end of grade 13. The latter is a pre-requisite for entrance into degree programmes in the public university system (World Bank, 2011). The primary languages used in the education system are Sinhala, Tamil and English. Most government schools are single medium schools offering instruction in either Sinhala or Tamil. While some schools offer two mediums, very few schools offer all three.

**Table 6: Government schools by medium of instruction and province**

Province	Sinhala	Tamil	Sinhala & Tamil	Sinhala & English	Tamil & English	Sinhala, Tamil & English	Total
Western	1062	106	19	142	14	16	1359
Central	846	534	16	87	20	16	1519
Southern	972	37	11	89	3		1112
Northern	28	898	3	1	67		997
Eastern	263	789	5	6	47		1110
North Western	986	159	12	88	8	3	1256
North Central	686	93	2	31			812
Uva	640	198	3	48	7	4	900
Sabaragamuwa	849	195	4	66	7	8	1129
Total	6332	3009	75	558	173	47	10194

Source: (Ministry of Education - Sri Lanka, 2018)

The medium of instruction in 62 percent of the total number of government schools is Sinhala, the language spoken by the Sinhalese majority; while Tamil, the language spoken by the largest minority, is the medium of instruction in 30 percent of schools. Furthermore, the number of Sinhalese-only schools far exceeds that of Tamil-only schools in all provinces except for the Northern and Eastern Provinces where the population is predominantly Tamil and Muslim<sup>18</sup> respectively.

Regardless of the language used however, all government schools follow the national curriculum prescribed by the state. “A national curriculum is defined as a common programme of study in schools that is designed to ensure nation-wide uniformity of content and standards in education” (National Education Commission, 2016, pp. 15–16) The curriculum is formulated by the National Institute of Education (NIE), a government body that was established in 1985 for this task of curriculum development. The national curriculum and Teachers’ Guides are prepared by the staff of the NIE with assistance from experts in the field such as university professors and lecturers, as well as school teachers. According to national curriculum policy, the curriculum cycle has a duration of eight years, after which time amendments are proposed and implemented as necessary. Free textbooks are provided by the government for all subjects up to grade 11. The writing, publication and distribution of textbooks is carried out by the Educational Publications Department (EPD). Similar to the curriculum development teams, the textbook writing committees consist of university

<sup>18</sup> Tamil is the first language of a majority of Muslims.

academics, practicing teachers and NIE subject specialists (Ministry of Education - Sri Lanka, 2013). The national curriculum, Teachers' Guides and textbooks are originally written in Sinhalese and translated in to Tamil and English thereafter.

In order to achieve its vision for the education system, the National Education Commission (NEC), an institution established in 1991 to formulate national policy on education, has set eight national goals of education (Ministry of Education - Sri Lanka, 2013). They are as follows:

- (i) Nation building and the establishment of a Sri Lankan identity through the promotion of national cohesion, national integrity, national unity, harmony, and peace, and recognizing cultural diversity in Sri Lanka's plural society within a concept of respect for human dignity.
- (ii) Recognising and conserving the best elements of the nation's heritage while responding to the challenges of a changing world.
- (iii) Creating and supporting an environment imbued with the norms of social justice and a democratic way of life that promotes respect for human rights, awareness of duties and obligations, and a deep and abiding concern for one another.
- (iv) Promoting the mental and physical well-being of individuals and a sustainable life style based on respect for human values.
- (v) Developing creativity, initiative, critical thinking, responsibility, accountability and other positive elements of a well-integrated and balanced personality.
- (vi) Human resource development by educating for productive work that enhances the quality of life of the individual and the nation and contributes to the economic development of Sri Lanka.
- (vii) Preparing individuals to adapt to and manage change, and to develop capacity to cope with complex and unforeseen situations in a rapidly changing world.
- (viii) Fostering attitudes and skills that will contribute to securing an honourable place in the international community, based on justice, equality and mutual respect.

(National Education Commission, 2003, p. 71)

Stemming from a concern regarding the ongoing communal tensions that are impeding the holistic development of the country, this thesis concentrates on the first of these ambitious national goals. Thus, it sets out to explore the manner in which the goal of nation building is

being pursued through the Sri Lankan education system. In doing so, among the many disciplines that are a part of general education, it chooses to focus on history teaching in secondary school.

### Why history?

The reasoning behind the choice of history education as the main focus of the research, is the high relevance of the subject to the task of constructing national identity, as well as its ability to influence perceptions of and attitudes towards diversity by disseminating information regarding the origins, histories and imageries of the different ethnic and religious groups that make up the Sri Lankan nation. Furthermore, history is one of the few compulsory subjects taught in state secondary schools, and thereby has a vast outreach. This means that youth in all government schools across the country are exposed to the knowledge and corresponding values transmitted through the subject of history, irrespective of their gender, ethnicity, religion or family background.<sup>19</sup>

### *Contribution to the field*

By trying to understand how the task of nation building is being carried out through history education in a diverse post-war society such as Sri Lanka, this thesis aims to contribute to the wider discourse on education, conflict and development. In doing so it hopes to address some of the gaps that have been identified within the field, such as the relative lack of focus on issues relating to the quality of education compared to those relating to educational access (Smith, 2009). The need to create a better understanding of the ways that education can foster reconciliation, which has been flagged by Smith (2007) and many others, will also be taken up by directing attention towards the reconciliatory potential of history teaching. Moreover, the literature on history education is widely explored in this thesis in order to situate the Sri Lankan experience within the global context and see where the similarities and differences lie.

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<sup>19</sup> During the war years the LTTE established its own Department of Education that published and distributed alternative history textbooks to students in the areas under its control (Sørensen, 2008). These LTTE commissioned history textbooks served as supplementary reading material, since students in those areas still followed the mainstream curriculum for the purpose of facing the national examinations. The LTTE's reasoning for introducing its own version of history can be understood by reading a passage from the Forward of a history textbook, which states, "The history textbooks by the Sri Lankan government that are taught in the schools are not based on true history, but have exaggerated the Sinhalese community, concealed the greatness of the Tamils and has been twisted in a manner to demean the Tamils... By teaching Tamil translations of Sinhala works, written by and for the Sinhalese, the Tamil students are taught Sinhalese history, which says that this Sinhala-Buddhist country is only for them and that their history is the history of Eelam" (Sambandan, 2004).

Meanwhile, the thesis also draws on the identity discourse, focusing mainly on the concepts of ethnicity, religion and nationality, since they are intricately related to conflict and education. Although ethnicity in itself is not a cause of conflict, it is often mobilised to generate conflict (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000; Smith, 2009). Thus, this research attempts to understand how identities such as ethnicity and religion sometimes become ‘conflict producers’ through education.

Although some of the work on education in Sri Lanka has touched on certain problems associated with history teaching as part of broader research, focused studies on history education and its impact on communal relations as well as its potential to promote reconciliation, are hard to find. The few papers that do deal specifically with history teaching such as the work of Gaul (2014, 2015), are purely based on reviews of textbooks and secondary literature. Therefore, the current thesis makes an original contribution to this body of knowledge in multiple ways. First, its aim to understand how the goal of nation building is being pursued through history education is a unique focus, which has not been looked at thus far. Second, unlike other similar studies, this research is based on both textbook analysis as well as primary research with a range of educational stakeholders including youth, teachers, curriculum developers, textbook writers and other academics. The latter component facilitates an understanding of the influences that feed into the delivery of history education and the impacts that emerge from receiving it. Third, by exploring how the ‘Sri Lankan nation’ is being built through history education, this thesis makes a concrete effort to understand the identity politics of teaching history in a plural society that is emerging from conflict.

## 1.2. Research questions and objective

Following the end of the armed conflict in Sri Lanka, the need to promote reconciliation has been gaining increasing recognition, particularly due to the continuing ethnic and religious tensions that are impeding the development of the country. Although several measures have already been taken to foster reconciliation, an avenue that has not been exploited to its true potential, is education. Remedying this oversight, the current thesis strives to unpack the first national goal of education set out by the NEC, which involves nation building and the establishment of a Sri Lankan identity through the promotion of social cohesion and the recognition of cultural diversity in Sri Lanka’s plural society. Given its relevance to this goal and its ability to shape the perceptions and attitudes of youth towards diversity, history teaching

in secondary school acts as the main focus of the research. As such, the thesis explores how the goal of nation building is being carried out through the Sri Lankan education system by focusing on the subject of history. Through such an exploration the thesis will attempt to answer three main research questions.

1. What type of nation is being built through history education in Sri Lanka?
2. How is the ethnic and religious diversity which characterises the Sri Lankan nation being dealt with through history education?
3. How are Sri Lankan youth being aided in understanding the sensitive matters which impeded the nation building exercise in the recent past and resulted in the break out of the ethnic conflict?

By answering these questions, the objective of the research is to understand the identity politics that affect education in a multicultural post-war country and use that understanding to contribute towards promoting reconciliation through education.

### 1.3. Structure of the thesis

This thesis follows the traditional structure of beginning with the literature review and methodology and proceeding to the results and discussion chapters thereafter. The format of the literature review chapter however, is less conventional. It is divided into two parts because of the intricate connections between the subjects covered in each section. The first deals with the broad education and conflict discourse and then narrows down to the nitty-gritties of teaching history in plural societies. The second part begins by looking at the concepts of identity that define a multicultural nation, before delving into a discussion on nation building and the role that history education plays in relation to it. Thus, contrary to popular framing, this chapter takes conflict as the starting point and then brings the identity politics narrative into the picture.

Building on the theoretical foundations set in the literature review chapter, the research methodology begins with a detailed explanation of the conceptual framework of this thesis. It then gives a brief recap of the main questions and objectives of the project in order to draw logical connections to the methods of research. The general inductive approach used in the study, which is based on qualitative research, is then explained. This leads to the main body of

the chapter, which involves the data collection and data analysis procedures used in the research.

The thesis consists of three data chapters, based on the three research questions of the study. The first attempts to understand the factors that may influence the nation building exercise from the side of the educational providers, and thereby questions as to whether it is the ‘Sri Lankan nation’ or the ‘Sinhalese-Buddhist nation’ that is being formed through history education. It also looks at the patterns of the ethnic and national affiliation of youth, with a view to juxtaposing them against the trends that emerge from the history curriculum in relation to the construction of national identity. Primary data obtained through interviews and textbook analyses are used to carry out these tasks.

As conveyed through the second research question, the next data chapter looks at how the different ethnic and religious groups that make up the Sri Lankan population are represented within history education. It also tries to understand how such representations are perceived by educational stakeholders. The first task relies on textbook analysis while the latter task relies on data gathered through semi-structured interviews.

The third data chapter deals with the grave task of investigating how the sensitive issues which led up to the break out of the ethnic conflict and impeded the nation building exercise, are handled through history education. In other words, it tries to understand how Sri Lankan youth are educated about the troubled past of their nation, which made it what it is today. While secondary literature is used in this chapter to identify the sensitive matters in question, the rest of the investigation is based on data collected from textbook reviews and participant interviews.

Finally, the concluding chapter of this thesis brings together the key findings relating to the main research questions and attempts to provide an explanation relevant to the overall theme of nation building through history education. With the hope of generating practical implications from this extensive research project, some directions for future research will also be laid out in this final chapter.

## 2. Literature review

### Introduction

Given the multidisciplinary nature of this thesis, the relevant literature spans a range of fields. The first section of this review deals with the duality of the impact of education on conflict, going on to analyse the relationship between education and development, reconstruction and reconciliation. It then zones in on one method of promoting reconciliation through education – the teaching of history. In order to understand the intricacies of teaching history in a post-war plural society, the next two sub sections look at the representation of diversity and the handling of ethnically sensitive matters through history education, first at a global level and then in terms of the Sri Lankan context.

The second part of the review begins with a brief look at some of the identity concepts that explain diversity in a society, thereby feeding into a discussion on nation building. The final section sheds light on nation building and the role education plays in it. Narrowing the focus once again to the teaching of history, the chapter ends by examining the suitability of pursuing nation building as a goal of history education.

## **PART I**

### 2.1. Education and conflict

The importance of education in conflict prevention and resolution is universally recognised. It was stated at the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000, that “education can play a key role in preventing conflict and building peace” (Tomlinson and Benefield, 2005, p. 1). This is because values, perceptions, capabilities and behaviours which are conducive to peaceful co-existence can be inculcated in children through education (World Bank, 2005). The World Bank further takes the view that education has the potential to bridge economic, social, and ethnic divides; address inequalities in growth and development; and substitute violent means of communication with constructive dialogue and debate. The realisation of these seemingly idealistic beliefs is possible if they are accepted as important goals of education by the relevant stakeholders and given prominence in the design and implementation of education systems.



Such an acceptance regarding the objectives of education has been established at a global scale through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) wherein:

Article 29 states that the aims of education include ‘respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms’ and ‘the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin. (Smith and Vaux, 2003, p. 11)

Smith<sup>20</sup> (2009) notes that this convention stands out in comparison to other legislation due to its focus on the content and quality of education instead of being limited to issues of access. A similar focus on the conceptual side of educational provision can be found in this thesis which builds on the underlying premise that “formal education can shape the understandings, attitudes, and ultimately, the behaviour of individuals” (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000, p. 9).

In contrast to its positive features, education can also be a source of conflict or it can prolong and aggravate conflicts. Davies (2004) holds the opinion that education plays a greater role in causing conflicts than promoting peace because it reproduces economic, gender based, and ethnic and religious inequalities. Since education is an intergenerational medium which transmits social and cultural values, Margaret Smith (2005) argues that negative stereotypes and a resulting acceptance of conflict could make up part of what is passed down. This view is echoed by Alan Smith (2009) in a preparatory paper on education and conflict prepared for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2011. In relation to the purposes of education, he maintains that education could be dangerous when used as a tool for ideological development, in the form of nation building and political proselytizing. For instance, citing a United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) study, Smith and Vaux (2003) give examples of education being used to suppress the identities of minorities, politically manipulate textbooks and the teaching of history, and foster ideas of superiority in terms of other nations. Summing up these arguments in a study titled *The two faces of education in ethnic conflict*, Bush and Saltarelli (2000) view education as part of the problem as well as the solution.

When considering the conflict-education nexus, although the effect of conflict on education has been deeply analysed, the reverse, or in other words the impact of education on perpetuating

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<sup>20</sup> This section draws heavily on the work of Prof. Alan Smith who holds the UNESCO Chair at Ulster University in Northern Ireland. His area of research focuses primarily on education, conflict and peace building.

values and attitudes that lead to conflict has not been sufficiently studied (World Bank, 2005). Smith (2009) reasons that this is because the impact of education on conflict is more elusive than its inverse, warranting contemplation on the ideologies, values, content and processes of education. As a research area it is therefore more sensitive and as a result more likely to be ignored (Smith, 2009).

Education in conflict and post-conflict situations is still in its early stages as an accepted field of study (Tomlinson and Benefield, 2005). In order to advance this field Leach and Dunne (2007) bring together a collection of scholarly work that aims to deeply explore the complicated relationship between education and conflict during the different stages of conflict, and to look at the potential of education in promoting reconciliation and social inclusion. Validating their approach, Smith (2007) explains that different challenges emerge based on whether education is provided during relatively peaceful times, when violent conflict is ongoing, during the post-conflict reconstruction phase, or when peace and reconciliation are being pursued. Given that this thesis focuses on a post-war society, it is important to take a closer look at the two latter stages.

#### *Educational reconstruction:*

A report on *Education for reconstruction* (Arnhold *et al.*, 1998) lists out the various manifestations of educational reconstruction; namely physical reconstruction, ideological reconstruction, psychological reconstruction, provision of materials and curricular reconstruction, and human resources. As Smith (2007, p. 29) holds, “There is a growing appreciation that reconstruction is not simply about replacing the physical infrastructure of schools, but needs to include opportunities for rebuilding human relations and inclusive education systems.” Focusing on curricular reconstruction which is a key concern of this thesis, the World Bank (2005) maintains that while curriculum reform can usually only be taken up later on in the reconstruction process, it can be facilitated by certain early responses. In fact, Smith and Vaux (2003) tout the importance of considering the relationship between formal education and conflict, not only in crisis situations, but as a key aspect of development planning. Research suggests that education in post-conflict situations is most effective when viewed through a development lens, and as such, work on education and conflict has shifted from reactionary to proactive, based on the premise that education should try to identify as well

as alleviate the effects of conflict (Tebbe, 2006). In order to do this, educational strategies need to address the root causes and indicators of conflict (Tebbe, 2006).

#### *Education for reconciliation:*

Moving past the reconstruction and development phase, it is important to consider “the crucial relationship between education and reconciliation” which has been regularly flagged by educational stakeholders<sup>21</sup> (Paulson, 2011b). According to Dyer (2007) the role of formal schooling in dealing with conflict and promoting reconciliation around the world has been established. Paulson elaborates how reconciliation is often cited as one of the main goals of educational approaches in different global contexts. Meanwhile Nicolai (2009) holds that education is popularly considered to be one of the leading avenues of reconciliation and Chapman (2007) echoes his point by explaining that among the variety of methods that societies have at their disposal to promote reconciliation and social cohesion, the use of public education holds a primary position.

The concept of reconciliation however, is not easy to define. The uncertainty surrounding it extends to its form, its required elements and members, and its results (Paulson, 2011b). Attempting to reach a definition McCully (2010, p. 177) holds that, “reconciliation has come to be understood as a process involving a transformation to new relationships between political communities, rather than between individuals.” The focus on groups lies in the fact that reconciliation leads to a shift in collective identities and mutual trust founded on a sense of ‘justice’ and ‘forgiveness’ (McCully, 2010). However, the latter concepts lead to contention regarding reconciliation since some perceive it to have Christian undertones whereby forgiving involves forgetting, which in turn negates the need for justice as it is seen as retribution (Cole, 2007b). Nevertheless, Cole (2007b) maintains that it is often those who have suspect connections to past wrongdoings who view reconciliation and justice as antithetical and use the former as a method of promoting social amnesia. She also stresses the importance of viewing reconciliation as “a long-term, multi-layered, and multigenerational process” (Cole, 2007a, p. 2).

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<sup>21</sup> See for example (Minow, 1998; Smith and Vaux, 2003).

Drawing on the work of several scholars<sup>22</sup>, Paulson (2011b, p. 3) identifies some constructive methods of promoting reconciliation, namely, “increasing opportunities for inter-group contact, fostering co-existence, learning to live together, and encouraging dialogue.” While it is fair to argue that education can indeed play a role in implementing these strategies, there remains much ambiguity regarding concrete methods through which education can be used to promote reconciliation. As Smith (2007) holds, a better understanding of the contribution education can make to the process of reconciliation needs to be established. For instance, the implications of promoting reconciliation through education by addressing the legacies of conflict requires further investigation (Smith, 2007). As Parker and Bickmore (2012) explain, curriculum and pedagogies which disregard conflict could exacerbate tensions between ethnic and religious groups and reinforce cultural and social hierarchies. “Thus, pedagogy for peace and reconciliation cannot actually be ‘peaceful’, in the sense of calm or non-disruptive” (Parker and Bickmore, 2012, p. 48). It is hoped that the findings of this research will help to clear up some of this ambiguity surrounding the role of education in promoting reconciliation by directing attention towards the teaching of history and its reconciliatory potential.

The above discussion points to several gaps in the literature which this thesis aims to fill in relation to the Sri Lankan context. Understanding the relatively less researched impact of education on conflict for starters is vital in the plural Sri Lankan society which has a history of educational measures inciting ethnic tensions. The fact that the country is also in the post-war stage warrants investigation into how education could be used to prevent further conflict and build peace.

## 2.2. History education in plural societies

Apart from being one of the main subjects taught in schools, the discipline of history commands a primary position within the post-conflict education discourse, particularly in plural societies. It is a subject that not only transmits knowledge but also impacts the way the younger generation place themselves and others in society. In the eloquent words of Freedman et al. (2008, p. 298), “if nations are ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson, 1983)<sup>23</sup>, then historical narratives are key to shaping how communities understand themselves.” The formation of such

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<sup>22</sup> See (Sampson, 2003; Sinclair, 2004; Tully, 2004; Donnelly and Hughes, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> Anderson’s take on nationalism and the emergence of the modern nation-state will be discussed in section 2.3 of this chapter.

an understanding becomes especially complicated in multi ethnic and multi religious societies since the representation of diversity is dependent on the ideological and political considerations of those who control the education system. As such, the teaching of history could have dichotomous effects, wherein, it could be a uniting or dividing force, it could create friends or foes, and it could foster social cohesion or social conflict (Steiner-Khamsi, 1994).

Starting with the positive features of history education, Korostelina states (2013, p. 19) that, “History education is increasingly recognized as a powerful tool of peacebuilding that can diminish negative ‘us-them’ perceptions and intergroup tensions and promote mutual understanding and reconciliation between conflicting parties.” Focusing on the Northern-Irish context, McCully (2010) too holds that it would not go against the goals of the discipline for history teaching to contribute towards post-conflict reconciliation. Furthermore, given that state provision of education is the norm in most countries and curriculums and textbooks are prescribed by the government, theoretically, history education could be used to build the society, foster social cohesion, and strengthen national identity (Chapman, 2007). However, little research has been done into the use of curriculum policy and history teaching for wider social and political purposes such as social reconstruction and reconciliation (Chapman, 2007). Cole (2007a) agrees that although history education in general and its well known cases of reform - such as the revision of French-German textbooks in the 1920s and reform initiatives on German-Polish and Japanese textbooks in the post-World War II period (Smith, 2009) - have been extensively studied, the relationship between history teaching in secondary school and reconciliation remains murky in an academic sense.

In many societies emerging from conflict, history education is often a vital but underused component of the social recovery process (Cole and Barsalou, 2006). However, Chapman (2007) warns that it is important to bear in mind the limitations of utilising history education to foster social cohesion, and not place overly ambitious expectations on it as a change agent in reconciliatory processes. This is mainly because outside influences are in constant competition with formal education when it comes to creating an impact on the perceptions and attitudes of students. Thus, she maintains that history education could be seen to play a ‘contributing role’ at most.

Nonetheless, regardless of its impact on promoting national integration, “History teaching, then, in a divided environment creates special challenges, especially because history is so closely tied to the emotions associated with national identity and collective belonging” (McCully, 2012, p. 148). As such, it is often used to convey a national tale that stems from myths and legends, in order to legitimise the position of the powerful group in a diverse society (McCully, 2010). According to McCully (2012) this type of narrative leaves no room for an enquiry based, multi-perspective approach to history teaching which could help students to become critical and tolerant citizens. Cole and Barsalou (2006) too, explain that in plural countries state sanctioned official historical narratives which are closely related to group identities, are often contentious and prejudiced. Refraining from placing direct blame on one group however, Bush and Saltarelli (2000, p. 13) note that, “the distortion of history takes place intentionally and unintentionally both through acts of commission as well as omission.” Smith and Vaux (2003) on the other hand, believe that the potential blame lies in the conception of the curriculum. They hold that curriculums which are purely focussed on the intergenerational transmission of knowledge, packing syllabi with facts and figures and treating students as passive recipients of information, become perfect vessels through which particular ideologies and cultural and religious values can be transferred to the youth. They go on to mention particular aspects of the school curriculum which convey values; the manner in which language, religion and culture are dealt with; and the handling of national subjects such as arts, music, literature, history and geography. Here, as well as in the work of Bush and Saltarelli (2000), special mention is made of the subject of history and its potential to be utilised for ideological purposes. Unlike many papers dealing with post-conflict education which only mention the impact of history teaching in passing, it is good to note that these authors have singled it out and given it the prominence it deserves. Smith and Vaux (2003) further mention the connection between religion and education, since it is another important factor that affects identity.

Moving on from the role of the curriculum to that of history textbooks, these play a pivotal role in transmitting knowledge, values and ideas (Foster, 1999; Naseem, Arshad-Ayaz and Rodríguez, 2016; Grever and van der Vlies, 2017). Even if they may be seen as simple storybooks on the outside, history textbooks are another tool that is used for the ideological purpose of instilling common values, national sentiment and a strong sense of identity among youth (Foster, 1999; Naseem, Arshad-Ayaz and Rodríguez, 2016). In defining history

textbooks as educational resources used to transmit the contents of formal history education, Grever and van der Vlies (2017) maintain that they encompass overt or hidden pedagogic and moralistic aspirations since they are specifically produced for the purposes of teaching and learning. As such, they can be regarded as “collective memory agents of the nation” which “function as instruments for socialization and identity politics” (Grever and van der Vlies, 2017, p. 288). As apparatuses of history education, history textbooks too have conflict inducing powers (Butt, 2016) as well as conflict resolving powers (Lässig, 2013). In fact, Lässig mentions that during and after World War I, history textbooks were recognised by international peacekeepers as tools for overcoming conflicts, fostering mutual understanding and promoting reconciliation. It can be argued that although such a recognition, which is necessary in the aftermath of the Sri Lankan civil war, is emerging to an extent among the local academic community, any practical action in relation to it is yet to be seen.

Another important feature of history textbooks, particularly in societies emerging from conflict, is that they are often used as indicators to gauge the extent to which minorities and past rivals are represented within state education (McCully, 2010). The tendency to omit minority versions of historical events, especially those which are contentious in nature, is common (Greaney, 2006), as is the habit of perpetuating ethnic stereotypes (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000). Bush and Saltarelli’s study (2000) points to a review of Sri Lankan history textbooks used in the 1970s and 1980s which contain such practices of ethnic bias. According to that analysis Tamils were depicted in the Sinhalese history textbooks as the historical enemies of the Sinhalese with those who fought against them being hailed as patriots; and the Sinhalese Buddhists were painted as the only genuine Sri Lankans with the Tamils, Muslims and Christians being treated as insignificant outsiders and pushed to the periphery. Over two decades later, although all ethnic groups now share one version of the textbooks translated into different languages, it is hard to claim that the same allegations of ethnic bias can no longer be made. These controversies surrounding history textbooks make them objects of study not just for students, but also for the wider academic and political community (Butt, 2016).

It is worthwhile considering how these features developed in the international literature relate to the particularities of the country of study: i.e., that of Sri Lanka. First, the current research hopes to build clarity on the foggy relationship between history teaching and reconciliation within the diverse post-war Sri Lankan society. Second, with respect to Chapman’s (2007)

assertion that history education should be seen as playing a contributing role at most in promoting reconciliation, recent events in Sri Lanka regarding the re-emergence of ethnic and religious violence and its links to false historical narratives, lend greater support to Cole and Barsalou's (2006) argument of history education playing a vital role. This is because false claims and misrepresentations of local history widely shared on social media by ill-informed youth, were recognised as one of the key factors that exacerbated racial violence. Next, the present research postulates that the Sri Lankan history curriculum is conceptualised in the manner described by Smith and Vaux (2003) where rote learning is promoted above critical analysis, and it will attempt to prove that through the primary data. Finally, it is important to note that although Smith and Vaux mention the connection between religion and education as one that affects identity, they do not explore the possibility that in non-secular countries religious values and ideas can also be brought out through other subjects like history. Sri Lanka is the perfect case in point, with its secondary school history curriculum being heavily influenced by Buddhism.

It is evident from the global literature that two main topics of discussion among the academic and political community with respect to education in plural societies, are how diversity is recognised and contentious matters are dealt with through the teaching of history. These themes have a significant bearing on Sri Lanka since it is a multicultural nation dealing with a difficult past, where students from all ethnicities and religions are exposed to the same national history curriculum and textbooks in secondary school. Therefore, these topics will be looked at in the next few sections, by starting at the international level and then moving on to the Sri Lankan context.

### 2.2.1. The representation of diversity within history education

The challenge of how to teach diverse classrooms of students is one that educators have been faced with for a considerable time, and given the unique task assigned to history education of fostering national identity, this challenge is most relevant to those involved in teaching the subject of history (Foster, 1999). As Foster (1999, p. 251) notes, the pressing questions that require answering are: "What history gets told? Or, perhaps more importantly, whose history gets told? How should the experiences of various ethnic groups be portrayed?". These are some of the primary lines of enquiry followed in this thesis. Many nations all over the world such as the United States, Canada and Australia have struggled with the determination of how far the



national historical narrative taught in schools should be a unifying force by primarily focusing on the story of the dominant cultural group (Harris, 2013). It can be suggested that Sri Lanka needs to be added to this list. However, Harris maintains that diversity is a key element that should be featured within any historical narrative of a nation's past. Unfortunately, national stories that embrace diversity are hard to come by. Todorov (1999 cited in Lall, 2008, p. 105) theorises that the study of identity formation outlines a definite structure to the way in which identities are categorised. As such, the other is regarded as equal to us or different from us, and in the latter case different is often construed as inferior. According to Lall (2008) the formation of national identity follows a similar pattern. This pattern often filters into national narratives taught in school, whereby the dominant social group in society is regarded as superior with the minorities being shown in an inferior light.

A piece of work that makes a valuable contribution to the ongoing discussion on diversity is that of Naseem, Arshad-Ayaz and Rodríguez (2016) titled, *Representation of minorities in textbooks: International comparative perspectives*. The authors explain that the positive and negative features of textbooks are connected to the representation and misrepresentation of individuals, groups or nations. "Representations, it can be argued, are never neutral. They are laden with power dynamics" (Naseem, Arshad-Ayaz and Rodríguez, 2016, p. 8). These scholars maintain that the power referred to here is that of the majority, who uses it to identify the 'others' in society. Thus, representation involves inclusion and exclusion. Taking Pakistani social studies and language textbooks as an example, Naseem, Arshad-Ayaz and Rodríguez explain how minorities were blatantly excluded from the national tale, transmitting a picture of a homogeneous society sans minority populations. In this manner, they assert that textbooks could be used to normalise the positions of the dominant group and the 'others'. Steiner-Khamsi (1994) adds that the main socio-cultural group in a society develops a sense of belonging to their motherland by singling out those who are not welcome to feel at home in their country, namely minorities and immigrants. Ignoring the histories of these groups when narrating the national story in the history classroom is one way they achieve this objective.

In a book chapter titled, *Textbooks, respect for diversity and social cohesion*, Vincent Greaney (2006, p. 5) outlines eight ways through which textbooks are often used to thwart the recognition of diversity within societal narratives. They are: 1) narrow nationalism, 2) religious bias, 3) omission, 4) imbalance, 5) historical inaccuracy, 6) treatment of physical force and

militarism, 7) use of persuasive techniques, and 8) artwork.<sup>24</sup> While some of these methods are self-explanatory, it is useful to briefly take a closer look at a few of them. Beginning with narrow nationalism, it “refers to a pronounced, uncritical devotion to one’s country or state” (Greaney, 2006, p. 5), ‘uncritical’ being the key word in this instance. Thus, transmitting this type of sentiment through textbooks often involves indoctrination. As the name suggests, omission refers to the failure to include information about other groups in society and sometimes even to acknowledge their presence. Using an example from Sri Lanka itself, Greaney point out that according to Rasanayagam and Palaniappan (1999 cited in Greaney, 2006, p. 8) a study of textbooks produced in the Tamil language highlighted the omission of important features of the economic and cultural life of Tamils, with historical narratives largely being focused on Sinhalese kings. One form of imbalance, the next item on Greaney’s list, is to trivialise or ignore the perspectives of the victimised or disadvantaged groups in society, whereas historical inaccuracy involves the distortion of history through negligence or for ideological reasons. Another tendency of history textbooks is to glamorize the use of physical and military force and bestow superhuman qualities upon national heroes, who more often than not, belong to the dominant ethnic group. Finally, persuasive techniques such as the use of strong adjectives contribute towards the acceptance of some groups and the discrimination of others. The methods identified by Greaney of promoting nationalistic agendas at the expense of the recognition of diversity, serve as good guidelines with which to analyse history textbooks.

Greaney’s work also covers how disregarding diversity through history education could have significant impacts on student identities. To begin with, negative stereotypes, particularly those built upon existing attitudes towards different groups, could be created through biased textbook content. Being in their formative years, secondary school students are often highly influenced by the history lessons taught in school. This makes the glorification of one group and the abasement of others within history textbooks particularly damaging towards efforts of promoting social cohesion and unity in diverse societies. As Farr (1986 cited in Greaney, 2006, p. 2) states, youth who are exposed to strongly nationalistic historical storytelling in school could form an inflated sense of importance regarding their own nation while simultaneously disregarding other nationalities. “Many grow up to become adults who never outgrow their

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<sup>24</sup> These will be used as criteria to analyse history textbooks. Further information can be found in the methodology chapter of this thesis.

basic ethnocentrism.” It is also important to bear in mind that from home and family to peers and the community, youth views and attitudes, particularly towards others, are moulded by a range of factors; many of which affect children even before they enter school (Greaney, 2006).

Having broached the subject of children’s identities, it is useful to revisit the work of Bush and Saltarelli (2000) who address some salient points in this regard. Starting with the claim that there is no consensus on the process of ethnic identity formation in children, they stress the importance of gaining greater knowledge on the subject, particularly in situations of ethnic conflict. Their argument is built on the findings of Padilla, Ruiz and Brand (1974 cited in Bush and Saltarelli, 2000, p. 3) that ethnic attitudes are formed at an early age and the positive or negative prejudices that get instilled in young ones become stronger over time. Since history in a plural society is replete with ethnically coloured events, the manner in which the subject is taught in school is likely to have a significant impact on the development of ethnic attitudes in children. They go on to discuss how ethnic stereotypes and prejudices which are prevalent in society find their way into schools. “Children do not come to the classroom as blank slates. They bring with them the attitudes, values and behaviour of their societies beyond the classroom walls” (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000, p. 3). The case of Sri Lanka, where ethnic chauvinism and stereotyping that was common within both the majority and minority communities, was used as an example by this duo since those attitudes and practices entered into schools through social studies textbooks (history used to be taught as a subsection of social studies). This is clearly detrimental to social cohesion both in schools and in society at large. Yet, the penetrability of the barrier between school and society means that just as negative attitudes may flow into schools from society, a reverse flow of positive attitudes could also take place. Thus, with effective education students could become agents of social cohesion by transmitting tolerant views from the classroom into the community (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000).

It can be argued that another possible impact of misrepresenting diversity through education can be found within the capability and wellbeing literature; the formation of adaptive preferences. This concept as seen by the pioneers of the Capability Approach, Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, refers to displays of self-repudiation (Watts, Comim and Ridley, 2008). Although Sen’s application of adaptive preferences is limited to basic capabilities, Nussbaum extends the concept to a broad range of aspirations, and it is the latter application that is discussed in this thesis. Adaptive preferences can be explained as “the internalisation of

external constraints upon the individual's well-being so that she acquiesces in her deprivation and may even come to value it because she cannot envisage a better life for herself" (Watts, Comim and Ridley, 2008, pp. 1–2). Based on this theory, the question that is relevant to the current study is whether the preferences of minority youth regarding what it means to be a Sri Lankan national have been adapted to reflect their assigned status in society. The connection between adaptive preferences and education is articulated by Watts, Comim and Ridley (2008, pp. 2–3) in the following manner.

... education has the potential to challenge the insidious nature of adaptive preferences... More and better education may provide the individual with more opportunities to develop the reflection and reflexivity needed to challenge adaptive preferences so that, even if it is not possible for her to change the circumstances constraining her well-being, she can cease her acquiescence in them and learn to recognise the potential for a better life... However, education can also be oppressive, teaching individuals, for instance, that they should conform to their place in society or teaching them that they should discriminate against others on grounds of race or gender.

Thus, there is a possibility for history education in particular to affect the way minority citizens view their position in society, based on how their respective ethnic groups are represented. While on one hand they may subconsciously lower their expectations of what it means to be a member of the nation, on the other hand biased representations may lead them to recognise the injustices they face and encourage them to stand up against them.

In fact, 'the politics of recognition' or 'identity politics', which refers to the intensification of group identities, has seen a gradual predominance in diverse societies (Chapman, 2007). Torsti (2007) holds that the national basis for developing history curricula and teaching the nation's past can be viewed as a type of identity politics. Amin (2014) explains that efforts to narrate the story of the nation invariably involve the demarcation of those who belong to the nation from those who do not, but since the lines of separation are not fixed, they are exposed to opposition from the excluded groups. This is because "At the heart of a politics of recognition is the idea that misrecognition of an identity by others is harmful in the development of the individual" (Amin, 2014, p. 419). One of the main propositions of this thesis is that misrepresentation of minorities within the history curriculum in Sri Lanka could have negative effects on the identities of minority youth.

### *The representation of diversity within the Sri Lankan history curriculum*

In a World Bank report titled *Respect for diversity in educational publication – The Sri Lanka experience*, Wickrema and Colenso (2003, pp. 6–10) discuss the measures that have been taken over the past few decades to foster social cohesion through state educational reading material. Until around the time the report was written however, the authors state that there was a general consensus that little had been done to actively promote diversity and multiculturalism through the education system. In order to show the opposition raised against this inactivity, they outline some of the main studies that had been undertaken to analyse state educational publications. One of them is a study carried out in 1998 by the Sama Sakthi Teachers Forum on the role of textbooks for multi-social reconciliation. The fact that the textbooks fail to teach students about the features of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society and that Sinhalese Buddhist attitudes are dominant in the Sinhala medium textbooks, are a couple of the criticisms put forward through this research. A textbook analysis conducted by Rasanayagam and Palaniappan in 1999<sup>25</sup> is another study discussed by Wickrema and Colenso. Among other things, this research asserts that the country's history is limited to the stories of a few Sinhalese kings, there is a lack of Tamil culture and history with no chapter being devoted to Tamils, Hinduism and the Jaffna kingdoms, biased language portrays Tamils in a negative light, and there are many inaccuracies in Tamil vocabulary/terminology. While some of these criticisms have been addressed to a certain degree, others can be levelled against the newly revised textbooks as well. The final research project presented by Wickrema and Colenso is an assessment of ethno-cultural and religious bias in social studies and history texts of grades 7,8,10 and 11 carried out by Nira Wickramasinghe and Sasanka Perera in 1999. "The study concludes that biases are present in the theoretical understanding of what constitutes history (the unquestioned narrative of the Sinhala- Buddhist nation state), in what constitutes identity, and in what is not referred to" (Wickrema and Colenso, 2003, p. 10). Once again, it is possible to argue that an analysis of the revised textbooks would derive the same conclusions. This is discouraging considering the fact that following some of these studies several measures were adopted to address issues of diversity within educational publications. These include establishing units to monitor bias, exploring the Multiple Textbook Option (MBO), training authors and publishers, and instituting respect for diversity review panels. Tracking the evolution of policy related to social cohesion in education, Aturupane and Wikramanayake (2011) too, note that eliminating the

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<sup>25</sup> This study was mentioned in the previous section of this chapter to exemplify Greaney's concept of omission in relation to the content of history textbooks.

explicit and implicit bias in history textbooks proved to be one of the most difficult curriculum changes to bring about. They maintain that the importance of attempting it however is undeniable, stating that educational stakeholders need to make a coordinated effort to “present the history curriculum in a way that is representative of all ethnic and religious groups in the country” (Aturupane and Wikramanayake, 2011, p. 19).

Among the more recent studies carried out into the promotion of social cohesion through educational material in Sri Lanka, the work of Gaul who analysed the first set of history textbooks published from 2007 onwards when history was made a compulsory subject in secondary school, stands out. It is important to point out that these are the same textbooks that are analysed in the current study, which unlike Gaul’s research, also consists of further primary data gathered through interviews with educational stakeholders. Gaul’s two papers respectively titled, ‘Where are the minorities? The elusiveness of multiculturalism and positive recognition in Sri Lankan history textbooks’ (2014) and ‘Security, sovereignty, patriotism—Sinhalese nationalism and the state in Sri Lankan history textbooks’ (2015), contain several valuable observations and insights regarding the current status of history education in the country.

The main premise of the first article is that the textbooks hinder the promotion of diversity in many ways such as by propagating the ‘myth of descent’, highlighting the unbreakable bond between Buddhism and the Sri Lankan state, and ignoring or negatively portraying the Tamil community. The myth of descent refers to the legend regarding the arrival of Prince Vijaya and 700 followers in Sri Lanka. Believed to be the first people to arrive in the island, they were identified as Aryans, implying that they were the ancestors of the Sinhalese community. The Tamil community on the other hand, who are thought to have originated from South India, are said to have invaded the country in later times and added to its population. Thus, this legend which is derived from the Mahavamsa<sup>26</sup> effectively removes Tamils<sup>27</sup> from the Sri Lankan myth of origin. The fact that the legend of Vijaya and the Sinhalese-Aryan concept itself are

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<sup>26</sup> A Pali chronicle which traces the legends and history of Sri Lanka from the 6<sup>th</sup> Century BC to the 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD. Composed of three parts which collectively present a continuous historical record of over two millennia, it can be regarded as the world’s longest unbroken historic record. The first part of the chronicle (chapters 1 – 37) which alone is referred to as the Mahavamsa, was written by a Buddhist monk, Ven. Mahanama Maha Thera. The second part (chapters 38 – 79) and third part (chapters 80 – 101) of the chronicle are referred to as the Culavamsa part 1 and 2. A historian and member of the Ceylon Civil Service named George Turnour published the first printed edition and English translation of the Mahavamsa in 1837 (*The Mahavamsa: The great chronicle of Sri Lanka*, 2007).

<sup>27</sup> The category of Tamils referred to here are the Sri Lankan Tamils.

disputed is not mentioned in the texts, which go on to discuss several other myths in a factual manner. The prime position given to Buddhism throughout the textbooks is the next factor which impedes efforts to foster pluralism. Although two of the other religions of the country, namely Hinduism and Islam, are discussed in the textbooks, Gaul maintains that they are paid comparatively little attention. She fails to mention however that Christianity too is discussed in the textbooks but it is portrayed as a pervasive force. The protection of Buddhism is established as a core value that must be protected by all the citizens of the country. In fact, the greatness of rulers is judged according to the services rendered by them towards the protection and promotion of Buddhism. To quote Gaul (2014, p. 96), “Establishing religion, especially a particular faith, as a core value and tradition of all ‘Sri Lankans’ is highly problematic for the vision of an integrated and pluralistic society.” Finally, answering the question posed in the title of her paper, Gaul asserts that minorities are side-lined in the narrative of the Sri Lankan nation by being portrayed as foreigners, outsiders and even invaders. According to her, the ‘othering’ of Tamils and Muslims within the textbooks involves differentiating them from the protagonist of the nation’s tale, the Sinhalese community, and implicitly raising questions as to whether they should even be considered as ‘Sri Lankans’. Further assertions regarding the lack of Tamil and Muslim heroes are made by Gaul, who holds that all prominent figures such as kings and politicians who could be considered as role models by students are exclusively Sinhalese. While this last assertion is true in terms of ancient history, its validity can be called in to question with respect to more recent history in which minority leaders are also recognised for their valuable service to the country.

Gaul’s (2015) latter article encapsulates the main ideas of the former, in explaining the creation of an exclusively Sinhalese claim to sovereignty that is brought out in the history textbooks. Echoing the sentiments of Cardozo and May (2009), she shows that the texts perpetuate the Sinhalese nationalist ideology with the aim of constructing a Sri Lankan identity which is synonymous with a Sinhalese Buddhist identity. Using storyline analysis, Gaul explains how the perfect nation that is portrayed in the textbooks can be identified in terms of who belongs, what ties them together and what separates them from the others. The findings indicate that the nation that is constructed in the school books consists solely of Sinhalese Buddhists. This explains the interchangeable use of the terms ‘Sri Lankan’, ‘Sinhalese’ and ‘Buddhist’ throughout the reading materials. Explicit references to the ‘Sinhala nation’ are also made in the texts, thereby forgoing the possibility of portraying an inclusive, multicultural conception

of the nation. Real life depictions of these exclusive claims to the nation can be seen in the present day by extremist groups who assert that the Sri Lankan island nation belongs solely to Sinhalese Buddhists.

### 2.2.2. The handling of ethnically sensitive matters through history education<sup>28</sup>

“One of history’s prime claims to relevance is assisting young people to understand the present in the light of the past” (Gallagher, 1996, p. 30). This is particularly true with respect to conflict and post-conflict societies since past and present issues are often interlinked (McCully, 2012). Thus, Gallagher holds that understanding history helps young people to also understand contemporary controversial issues. According to Paulson (2011a, p. 2) the importance of “coming to terms with the past” for individual and group wellbeing, is gaining more and more acceptance among researchers. Cole and Barsalou (2006) add that the passing of time does not break the historical connections and causations of present day problems and that the failure to address the causes of conflictual situations in particular, could have adverse future consequences. Therefore, for history teaching to pursue its true potential as a reconciliatory tool it needs to engage more with modern history (McCully, 2012), instead of solely focussing on the ancient past which is easier to handle within the classroom.

Dealing with the recent past through the discipline of history is particularly important when it comes to post-conflict societies, since the roots of conflict usually lie within that period. However, Chapman (2007, p. 321) discusses the gravity of the task of educating youth about sensitive or contentious matters of the past, which may involve altering the understanding of contested histories and unearthing difficult and uncomfortable recollections. As she writes, “There are very few societies that lack at least some events that the government or specific groups would prefer to relegate to the trash heap of national amnesia.” According to Chapman the discrimination of minorities is one of the key issues that most countries have trouble discussing in the history books. This is because identity is intricately connected to the portrayal of a group’s past, and hence the teaching of ethnically sensitive matters for instance, could affect perceptions of one’s own group and other groups in society (Cole, 2007b). While this may negatively impact group identity, the possibility of it creating an opposite effect cannot be ruled out. That is, the gaining of new perspectives regarding past controversies may help groups

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<sup>28</sup> Certain parts of this section are taken from a previous publication of the author: Warnasuriya, M. (2017) ‘Examining the value of teaching sensitive matters in history: The case of post-war Sri Lanka’, *International Journal of Historical Learning, Teaching and Research [IJHLTR]*, 14 (2), Spring/Summer, p. 93 -107.



to understand each other better by countering existing prejudices and dividing up the responsibility for the mistakes made (Barkan, 2005).

Furthermore, the generally accepted benefits of teaching controversial issues in school are ample, particularly within the field of social studies. Summarising the key points made by some of the experts in the profession (Oliver and Shaver, 1966; Engle and Ochoa, 1988; Evans and Saxe, 1996), Asimeng-Boahene (2007) holds that the discussion of contentious matters in the classroom is seen as a means of creating civic minded citizens who could perform effectively in a participatory democracy. The usefulness of pedagogies that deal with controversial topics in improving the critical thinking skills of students is undeniable (Rossi, 2006), as is their ability to teach students how to use evidence and shared values to constructively deal with those whose perspectives differ from their own (Young, 1996 cited in King, 2009). Relating these arguments to the subject of history, Levstik and Barton (2011) note that a grave consequence of the avoidance of controversy is that it denies the interpretive nature of history and thereby hinders the aforementioned efforts of promoting effective democratic participation.

The term ‘empathy’ is controversial in the scholarship on history education since some believe that feelings have no place within the discipline, which should purely involve a cognitive process (Foster, 2001 cited in McCully, 2012). However, there is another point of view that caring about the people and issues of the past is important when studying history. In a book titled ‘Teaching History for the Common Good’, two proponents of the latter belief, Barton and Levstik (2004), explain what it means to ‘do history’. Combining the activities and purposes of history education, they present four stances to clarify the practicality and importance of history teaching; one of which is the moral response stance. Advocates of this stance maintain that students should be expected to remember and recognize the virtues and vices of historical happenings. According to these authors, remembrance is important in terms of encouraging youth to empathise with the hardships faced by different groups throughout history. This is particularly true with respect to those adversely affected by conflict (McCully, 2012). While admiration serves to identify role models, condemnation plays a part in instilling a sense of justice in young people, upon hearing of past acts which marginalised, victimised and oppressed certain groups in society (Barton and Levstik, 2004). Thus, in order to fulfil the moral response stance, sensitive matters of the past need to be taught through history education.

Another argument in favour of teaching contentious issues is the need to use the discipline of history to counter the false information that is routinely circulated within communities (Cole, 2007b). Starting from home, children grow up hearing about communal versions of historical events, which may or may not be based in fact. However, despite the power of communal myths, school history too can be an effective conveyor of knowledge and information. Referring to the prevalence of historical myths in Northern Irish communities for instance, Conway (2006, p. 67) states the following:

I argue that these versions dynamic as they undoubtedly are, have not been as uniformly pervasive as we have been led to believe and that school history can make more inroads into myths learnt outside the classroom than has been previously thought.

Conway's assertion is based on the findings of multiple studies conducted in Mid Ulster in Northern Ireland in 1990, 1996 and 2001. She also carried out similar studies in Oxford in England during the same time. The research conducted in 1990 in Mid Ulster found that although students gained historical insights through multiple avenues, they were influenced most by the history lessons taught in school, while respondents in Oxford agreed that compared to anything else, public perceptions of present day issues were most effectively challenged through history education. A much larger survey conducted in the latter years on 1737 students revealed that 90 percent of the respondent group shared a desire to be taught about sensitive issues, believing that they should be made aware of the "facts" through school history. Only 10 percent of the cohort felt that it was best to avoid the teaching of sensitive issues. The findings of another study conducted among young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Northern Ireland by Magill, Smith and Hamber (2009) titled *The role of education in reconciliation*, support the teaching of sensitive issues, particularly those related to conflicts, within school. Two of the main recommendations that emerged from the study in relation to the past conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Northern Ireland were that "Education needs to explicitly address the recent past" and "Education needs to help young people understand why the conflict happened from a range of perspectives" (Magill, Smith and Hamber, 2009, pp. 107–108). Discussing the findings of similar empirical research conducted in Northern Ireland, McCully (2010) holds that although students consider history education to be worthwhile, they do not believe that it does the needful in aiding them to understand present issues by learning about the past. According to McCully the risk this shortfall poses is that it may lead youth to use the limited knowledge of the past gained through school to stabilise

prominent stories circulated among the community. These varied findings raise interesting questions regarding the value of teaching sensitive matters in history that can be investigated within the Sri Lankan context through the current research.

Unlike the students involved in Conway's studies, the 47 teachers interviewed by her during the same years agreed that it was not school but external factors that had the greatest impact on the political awareness of youth. While a majority of teachers from Mid Ulster believed that contentious matters should be cautiously taught in school in an effort to fight the power of communal myths, there was a general consensus among the cohort of teachers taken as a whole, that their ability to challenge external influences through school history was limited. This brings up the need to explore the opposing side of the debate on teaching sensitive matters in history.

The first conflicting argument is that even if contentious matters are taught in school, personal biases and external influences may prevent students from accepting them. Referring to research carried out among Estonians regarding their knowledge on Estonia's incorporation into the Soviet Union in 1940, Wertsch (2000) explains that although the respondents were better acquainted with the official narrative taught in school which propagated a Soviet version of events, they placed greater belief in the private version that was passed around within the community. According to Wertsch (2000, p. 39) the interviewees reactions to the official account could be considered as a case of 'knowing but not believing.' It can be argued however, that students are not expected to unquestioningly believe what is presented, but to critically analyse the information provided through history lessons. In fact, in a later work Wertsch (2002) asks if the objective of history teaching is to encourage critical thinking or to create a shared identity based on a historical narrative endorsed by the state.

This question was posed in relation to the concept of promoting a 'useable past' through history instruction at the school level. According to Fullinwider (1996) a proponent of 'patriotic history', a useable past is needed to help students to become good citizens with an interest in improving their country. In his view the discussion of contentious events could hinder the promotion of such a past. Chapman (2007) too, notes the difficulty of using history teaching to promote social cohesion and patriotism, while at the same time encouraging students to

critically assess the historical mistakes and failures of the nation. This problem, which appears unresolvable for the most part, is explained clearly by Cole (2007b, p. 128) who writes,

Closely related to the conservative nature of history education and the political discord that negative portrayals of the in-group inspire is the problem of finding a balance between frank critique and a narrative positive enough to engage students, as well as between nationalism and patriotism.

Incorporating the ideas of Foner, Cole herself presents a response which, though not a solution in itself, offers some valuable insight in this regard. It reads,

Teaching, which presents history to students as an academic discipline with widely accepted standards and methodologies, rather than as a political tool or expression of nationalism, can help make the study of history “at its best ... not simply a collection of facts, not a politically sanctioned listing of indisputable ‘truths’, but an ongoing means of collective self-discovery about the nature of our society” (Foner, 2002, p. 88). (Cole, 2007b, p. 126)

Yet, the tensions surrounding history education in secondary school are compounded by the fact that students are considered to be in their formative years, requiring more caution to be exerted when deciding what and how much sensitive subject matter to expose them to (Cole, 2007b). In fact, the highly impressionable nature and emotional vulnerability of middle school students is likely to be a main argument put forth by educational stakeholders who advocate against the teaching of contentious matters in history. Moreover, sensitive subject matter could elicit emotional responses from students, particularly in post-conflict settings where certain issues are still raw and painful to handle. Hence, when it comes to tackling contentious topics teachers sometimes prefer to deliver a monologue instead of engaging in a dialogue with students, for fear of letting the situation get out of hand (Hess, 2004). As Valls (2007) notes, students are not passive recipients of history education. Yet, that is how they appear to be viewed in many countries including Sri Lanka, where history pedagogies either inadvertently or purposefully promote the memorisation and regurgitation of information rather than critical thinking. Such pedagogies, which are unable to generate new insights that would be conducive towards reconciliation, severely impede efforts to educate youth about contentious events in the past.

Furthermore, teachers are often hesitant to tackle sensitive matters through history lessons and thereby tend to skim over or completely avoid them. This reluctance could be due to a lack of

capacity or it could stem from fears of individual perspectives compromising the objectivity required to teach controversial topics (Hess, 2005). The latter concern is particularly applicable to ethnically diverse societies such as that of Sri Lanka. As Low-Beer (2001) explains, teachers too are exposed to the same cultural and community influences as the students they teach. This could colour their perspectives and affect their ability to carry out fair, unbiased discussions in the classroom. Additionally, the pressure to cover the entire syllabus and adequately prepare students to face examinations is another common reason that leads teachers to avoid the time-consuming endeavour of tackling difficult subject matter (King, 2009).

#### *The handling of sensitive matters within the Sri Lankan history curriculum*

When it comes to sensitive issues, particularly those of an ethnic and religious nature, it is recent Sri Lankan history that requires the greatest consideration. This is because the roots of the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict which devastated the country from 1983 to 2009 are believed to have been sown during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>29</sup> However, neither the conflict itself nor the factors that led to it are effectively dealt with within the secondary school history curriculum, which ends with the constitutional reforms of 1978. Although the fact that the civil war in particular is not yet discussed in school is understandable given the relatively short amount of time that has passed since its conclusion (Gaul, 2014), the lack of meaningful engagement with modern Sri Lankan history in general is a point that has been flagged by certain scholars like Orjuela (2003), Cardozo (2008) and Jayawardane (2006).

While Jayawardane maintains that studies conducted from the 1980's onwards fault the textbooks for skimming through the contentious issues of the country's past, Cardozo (2008, p. 12) holds that the omission of information regarding the roots of the conflict "indicate a trend towards passive war education." The study on Sri Lankan textbooks conducted by Wickramasinghe and Perera in 1999 (cited in Wickrema and Colenso, 2003) which was previously mentioned in this chapter, also points out that modern history does not discuss the inequitable policies adopted by past governments and the ethnic tensions and conflicts they caused. The importance of doing so is explained by Orjuela (2003, p. 202) who writes,

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<sup>29</sup> Writers who support this argument include: (Tambiah, 1986; Little, 1994; Nayak, 2001; Ghosh, 2003; Clarence, 2007).

An understanding of how history is politically manipulated, about recent roots of conflict and mistakes made by all involved parties, helps to combat fears and ungrounded rationales for the demonization of ‘the other’.

Condensing these ideas, Gaul (2014) notes that the difficult past cannot be excluded from history lessons when attempting to promote social cohesion within the diverse Sri Lankan society.

Having taken conflict as the starting point and looked at the possible impacts that education could have on it, particularly through the teaching of history, it is time to bring in the discussion on the identity politics that drive education in plural societies. The next part of this literature review takes up this discussion, and in doing so it tackles a key theme of this thesis - nation building through education.

## **PART II**

### **2.3. Concepts of identity**

In order to comprehend the complexities of educating youth in a diverse society, it is important to create an understanding regarding the main concepts behind such diversity. This section briefly explains those concepts with a view to facilitating the upcoming discussion on nation building and the role that education in general and history teaching in particular, play in it.

#### **2.3.1. Defining ethnicity**

Understanding or defining ethnicity and the concepts that surround it is a complex task. One of the first scholars to attempt it was the renowned sociologist Max Weber. Starting with the idea of an ethnic group, Weber (1978 cited in Bacal, 1991, p. 13) held that it was based on a communal belief of a common origin and heritage, supported by similarities in physical appearance and customs as well as by shared memories of the past. Many scholars (Bell, 1975; Stavenhagen, 1986 cited in Bacal, 1991; Bush and Saltarelli, 2000; Eriksen, 2001) agree that ethnicity needs to be defined in cultural terms. Moreover, it is thought to involve cultural distinction, meaning that each ethnic group exists in relation to others (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000). As Brass (1991, p. 19) explains, “ethnicity is the subjective, symbolic, or emblematic use by a group of people of any aspect of culture in order to create internal cohesion and

differentiate themselves from other groups.” According to Stavenhagen (1986 cited in Bacal, 1991), the aspects of culture used to distinguish one’s group from others generally include language, religion, and nationality to name a few. Enhancing Brass’s definition, Stavenhagen clarifies that ethnic groups possess both subjective and objective characteristics. However, Weber’s work opposes this view since his definition is based on the purely subjective nature of ethnicity, which he terms as ‘presumed identity’ (Guibernau, 2010).

Fishman (1980 cited in Majstorović and Turjačanin, 2013, p. 17) moved the ethnicity discussion beyond theory by explaining how the concept plays out in reality. Ethnicity entails ‘being, doing, and knowing.’ The ‘being’ of ethnicity is related to blood ties and could thus be described as an inherent feeling. ‘Doing’ refers to identifying one’s self with a particular group and sharing poems, jokes, rituals (especially religious rituals) and many other rights and ceremonies which display the meaning of that group. ‘Knowing’ includes history, myths and legends which transfer intergenerational knowledge, accompanied by the language of an ethnic group which is the medium through which the said knowledge is transferred. Bandaranayake’s (1985, p. 4) definition of an ethnic group neatly encapsulates these ideas by describing it as “a historically defined, self-conscious community, which has its own distinctive history and culture, of which language and religion often constitute important aspects, and which has or had definite territorial affiliations<sup>30</sup> in the present and/or the past.”

In a paper titled ‘Constructing ethnicity: creating and recreating ethnic identity and culture’, Nagel (1994) brings up some other interesting ideas about ethnicity. She perceives culture and history as the building blocks of ethnicity since they are instrumental in constructing ethnic meaning. She warns that the claim of ethnicity being socially constructed should not be taken to mean that it has no historical basis. Furthermore, as the title of the article suggests, ethnic boundaries are constantly altered by oneself and by others. Ethnic identities too, are malleable. According to Bush and Saltarelli (2000), they could develop overtime or be assigned, or both. To borrow from Liebkind (1984, p. 31) “a person’s ethnicity is ascribed in the sense that one cannot choose the ethnic group into which one is born, but it is achieved to the extent that the meaning it acquires for one’s total identity is a matter of choice.” Barth (1998) asserts that ethnicity involves a ‘labelling process’ engaged in by one’s own ethnic group and external

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<sup>30</sup> The aspect of territoriality was a key feature at the preliminary stage of this research. The focus at the time was on the dimensions of land which are inextricably linked to the identity of ethnic groups and nations, particularly territorial claims regarding homelands.

parties. Thus, an individual's ethnic identity is based on how they see themselves as well as how others see them. Several associations could be drawn between these notions of ethnicity and history teaching. The most obvious is that the historical background of a particular ethnic group that is transmitted through education would feed into the ethnic interpretation of that group. Moreover, given the sensitivity of ethnic identity to internal and external perceptions of one's ethnic group, the way different groups are portrayed in history lessons could have powerful implications for the identities of students.

### 2.3.2. The role of religion

While the role of religion in sustaining group identity and solidarity has been deeply explored, relevant studies have tended to focus on the relationship between religion and ethnic identity, instead of dealing solely with religion (Peek, 2005). Religious affiliation has often been seen as one of the aspects of ethnic identity (Jacobson, 1997). Jacobson elaborates how in many societies ethnic and religious boundaries overlap, thereby making religion one of the distinctive features of an ethnic group. She warns however, that it cannot simply be assumed that religious identity is necessarily a sub set of ethnic identity, since members of a social group may at times feel like they are being pulled in different directions by their ethnicity and religion. The experience of Sinhalese Christians in Sri Lanka is a good example of this, given that the Sinhalese culture is so intricately woven with Buddhism rather than Christianity. Elaborating further on the Sri Lankan context, Gunatilleke (2018, p. 2) holds that the overlap between ethnicity and religion has led to the emergence of an 'ethno-religious' identity, as can be seen in the case of Sinhalese Buddhists. Thus, Williams (1988) maintains that the exact connection between religion and ethnic culture remains unknown in terms of whether religious affiliation is essential or ancillary to ethnic identity.

When it comes to defining religion, two good attempts can be found in the work of Johnson and Grim (2013). The first is borrowed from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (1996 cited in Johnson and Grim, 2013, p. 136) and it reads as, "generally, a religion is regarded as a set of beliefs and practices, usually involving acknowledgment of a divine or higher being or power, by which people order the conduct of their lives both practically and in a moral sense." Focusing on the actors involved in the phenomenon in their second attempt, Johnson and Grim (2013, p. 139) define a religion as, "a religious community of believers, followers, or adherents who hold there to be something distinctive in their beliefs, and who give their primary religious



allegiance and loyalty to that religion.” This distinctive belief is usually formed at an early age and strengthened during adulthood (Citrin, Reingold and Green, 1990). It is fair to claim that family upbringing and schooling play significant roles in reinforcing religious identity.

According to Werbner (2010), a discussion regarding religious identity entails a discussion regarding ‘difference’. This is because religious identity can be viewed as an amalgamation of boundaries, relatedness and otherness on one hand, and encompassment and inclusiveness on the other. Geertz (1993) too notes that religion lays down boundaries, identifying those who are included and those who are excluded. Stewart (2009) agrees that religious boundaries are less vague compared to ethnic boundaries. However, the demarcation of boundaries can become difficult when religious identity gets entangled with national identity.

### 2.3.3. Ethnic identity versus national identity

National identity can simply be viewed as one of the many collective identities that individual’s may hold. Joireman (2003) sees it as the politicized version of ethnic identity, and claims that when an ethnic group shares a common political identity their ethnicity becomes more than a mere social or cultural attachment. While highlighting both the subjective and objective nature of national identity, Wan and Vanderwerf criticize Morris’s (1995 cited in Wan and Vanderwerf, 2009, p. 32) definition of the concept as, “an individual’s sense of belonging to a collectivity that calls itself a nation,” for not portraying the latter. Remedying this oversight, they use the term ‘national identity’ to refer to three forms of identity: 1) the objective categories of national identification available in a given context, 2) an individual’s subjective sense of belonging to one of those categories of identification and 3) the strong emotional sense of collective solidarity people in a “nation” feel toward others in the “nation” (Wan and Vanderwerf, 2009, p. 33).

Theories of national identity broadly fall into two categories: primordialism and constructivism. Smith (1987) however, incorporates perennialist and ethno-symbolist theories into the first category and collectively defines them as theories that perceive national identity to be based on descent and historical bonds that form a common culture. He explains that constructivist theories on the other hand view national identity as a subjective phenomenon that is socially constructed and negotiable. A similar dialectical tension exists between essentialist and constructivist theories regarding the formation of nations. The bone of

contention here according to Eriksen (2001) is whether national communities naturally develop out of pre-existing cultural communities or whether they are purposefully formed. On this occasion Smith (1987) maintains a middle ground, claiming that the ethnic origins of nationalism cannot be denied nor can its modernity. What is implied by ethnic origins in this context are ethnic groups which Smith refers to as 'ethnies' and believes are an antecedent of nations. Thus, in Smith's view the roots of national identity can be found in ethnic identity as a pre-modern form of collective cultural identity (Guibernau, 2010). Meanwhile, Anderson (Anderson, 1983, p. 6) espouses a purely constructivist paradigm, describing a nation as a "an imagined political community." It is imagined because members of a nation feel commonality with their fellow citizens, although they may not personally know them. Likewise, it is a community because despite the inequity that may characterise it, "a nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson, 1983, p. 7).

Expanding on the power of ethno-nationalism, Connor (1993) claims that its effectiveness lies in the core belief that members of a nation are ancestrally related or in other words, share a common descent. While it is not necessary for members of a nation to be akin, those who appeal to ethno-nationalism understand that what is important is for them to merely believe that they are. It is the bond created by this belief that brings about the notion of "us and them" (Triandafyllidou, 1998). Triandafyllidou (1998) deeply explores this dichotomous feature of national identity in a paper titled, 'National identity and the 'other''. In it she refers to the definition of the ingroup and the differentiation of the ingroup from the others as the 'double-edged character of national identity', and questions whether it cannot then be thought of as an inward-looking self-consciousness of a community. Most pertinently, she argues "that the identity of a nation is defined and/or re-defined through the influence of 'significant others', namely other nations or ethnic groups that are perceived to threaten the nation, its distinctiveness, authenticity and/or independence". Thus, significant others could be external parties such as foreign nations or internal parties such as ethnic minorities or immigrant communities. Presenting the argument from the perspective of smaller societies that live in fear of being culturally absorbed by larger societies, Appadurai (2006, p. 588) states, "One man's imagined community is another man's political prison."

Being a strong proponent of constructivism, Gellner (1983) believes that nations are purely modern formations which are created by deceptively manipulating history to invent traditions

that appear to have continuity with the past.<sup>31</sup> Taking this idea even further in a chapter titled, ‘Identity on the borderline: modernity, new ethnicities and the unmaking of multiculturalism in Sri Lanka,’ Rajasingham-Senanayake (2002, p. 41) writes:

“It is not only in Sri Lanka that history’s hall of mirrors reflects ethnicity’s infinite regress. Most modern nations have invented their antiquity as theorists of nationalism from Renan (1990) to Anderson (1983) have noted. Usually invention of modern national histories has been accomplished by: a) selective forgetting of culturally mixed and hybrid pasts; b) constructing authentic, pure, and stable “present” ethnic identities; and c) projecting far back in time scientific identity categories and classifications that are essentially modern socio-political formations. Sri Lanka, with an almost two decades long armed conflict, has been no exception to this process of modern ethno-national identity construction.”

Agreeing with this characterisation of nations as constructed as opposed to natural communities, Wertsch (2002) explains that serious effort needs to be made to bring about and sustain their existence. As such, he maintains that the question of how to create a national identity based on loyalty to the nation, is one of the main issues faced by modern nation states, and it is towards this discussion that we now turn.

## 2.4. Nation building through education

Alesina and Reich (2015, p. 3) define ‘nation building’ as “a process which leads to the formation of countries in which the citizens feel a sufficient amount of commonality of interests, goals and preferences so that they do not wish to separate from each other.” Bringing in a political dimension to the national question, yet another characterisation of nation building views it as the creation of majorities, given that legitimacy in modern states is tied to majoritarian rule (Mylonas, Lawrence and Chenoweth, 2000). However, Alesina and Reich raise the need to differentiate between state building and nation building, explaining that although the end goal of both is to facilitate the smooth functioning of the state, the former does so by building institutions while the latter does so by building a national identity. Smith (2009) agrees with this categorization, believing that nation building relates to identity stemming from similar socio-cultural and religious backgrounds, while state building focusses on the rights and responsibilities of the citizenry regardless of their cultural identity. The

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<sup>31</sup> It is useful to look at Hobsbawm’s (1992) notion of invented traditions to gain greater clarity on this point. Hobsbawm (1992, p. 1) defines invented tradition as, “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.”

requirement to build such an identity is explained by Andrews et.al (2010) who holds that a sense of belonging to a national community is not an innate characteristic, but rather one that needs to be inculcated. This is a somewhat arguable assertion given that affiliation to the nation comes instinctively to many people. Yet, within ethnically plural societies in particular, it is acceptable that a cohesive national identity may need to be fostered among the diverse population.

Nation building exercises in the past have utilised a variety of tools and mechanisms from state languages and religions to competitive sport and the media (Coulby, Gundara and Jones, 1997; Alesina and Reich, 2015). Chief among them however, is public education. History has witnessed a plethora of incidents in varying contexts where schooling has been used to form nation-states (Tawil and Harley, 2004; Chapman, 2007). Basically, education plays a key role in building national identity (Lall, 2008) and increasing attention is being paid to this task it performs, particularly in diverse societies (Conway, 2006). As Arnot and Swartz (2012, p. 3) explain, much more is expected of education than simply equipping youth with the necessary skills to join the workforce. In their words, “Schools... are challenged to create a sense of belonging and entitlement, a common identity and patriotic project ‘in the name of the nation’.”

#### 2.4.1. Debates over the role of history teaching in nation building

Discussing Benedict Anderson’s ideas on national identification, Barton and Levstik (2004) explain that history is vital in terms of validating claims to nationality. Unlike other ideologies such as socialism, free trade and globalism, nationalism relies heavily on the establishment of historical foundations which lead up to the present day. Simply put, “to identify with a nation...means to identify with the past” (Barton and Levstik, 2004, p. 49). As such, history contributes towards the formation of national identity (Torsti, 2007), and the teaching of history as a subject in secondary school is viewed as an import tool for nation building (Conway, 2006; Grever and van der Vlies, 2017). As Wang (2008) elaborates, by teaching national narratives in school, nation-states attempt to create and strengthen the bond between each citizen and his or her motherland. However, state education can never be wholly removed from the political sphere within which it operates, and the numerous goals it pursues cannot all be considered impartial. Nation building is one such goal that is certainly not free of bias, in terms of deciding what constitutes the nation and how that should be transmitted to the next generation (Tawil and Harley, 2004). In explaining this conundrum, Al-Haj (2005) states that the vital question

is whether education should be used for nation building which often entails the promotion of patriotism, while simultaneously attempting to foster democratic values and multiculturalism. According to him the jury is still out on this issue, with scholarly reactions ranging from support to outright opposition.

Harris (2013) too discusses the two sides of the argument regarding the suitability of nation building being a goal of history education. He uses the ideas of Lee and Barton and Levstik (1992 and 2004 cited in Harris, 2013) who respectively maintain that fostering patriotism or national sentiment and democratic citizenship through history education does and does not go against the essence of the discipline. However, he claims that what is generally lacking in this regard is a discussion about the content of national narratives, since those which harp on the victorious aspects of the past and ignore the mistakes and the stories of minorities, tend to be exclusive. Yet, given that this subject is one that constantly springs up in the literature regarding history teaching, the claim that it is not paid sufficient attention can be judged as inaccurate. Nevertheless, assessing history textbooks “through the lens of the ‘nation’” (Moreau, 2003, p. 18) is a good way to analyse contention over the goals and subject matter of history education, and that is exactly what this thesis aims to do.

A piece of work that has greatly enhanced the philosophical debate on the role of history teaching in nation building is a handbook for teachers prepared by Gallagher (1996) titled, *History teaching and the promotion of democratic values and tolerance*. In it Gallagher illuminates the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century influences on history teaching, whereby the selective nature of the discipline is highlighted. According to her, school history tended to transmit narratives that were whitewashed, in order to foster national sentiment. These purely positive stories that were based exclusively on the dominant players were presented as factual accounts of the past, leaving no room for interpretation. Gallagher argues that this type of nationalistic historical storytelling can create feelings of superiority as well as fostering prejudice. Hadyn (2012) too shares his consternation regarding the popular belief that teaching a purely positive national story will foster national sentiment and loyalty as well as a sense of belonging and solidarity among countrymen. He made this argument in a paper critiquing the proposed return to a traditional version of history teaching in England which essentially involved the promotion of a celebratory national tale. While pointing out the failings of certain arguments in favour of this type of national narrative, he explains that it was based on flawed assumptions and a weak

understanding of the ways and means of teaching history. It is noteworthy that the arguments presented by Hadyn are quite unique, deviating from the usual (but no less relevant) claims of exclusivity and bias. He firstly points out the futility of presenting a dogmatic and purely positive account of history in an age where youth have far greater access to alternative sources of knowledge than they did in the past. He further enhances his stance by discussing the work of Professor Lawrence Stenhouse who advocated teaching history in a way that would enable youth to better understand their contemporary society. He held that the national issues were only some of the concerns facing modern day youth, who were interested in many other, more serious problems relating to the human condition. To quote Haydn (2012, p. 282), “History is not national: it is about the study of the human past, not just the national one.”

Bringing the conversation back to the wider debate regarding the position of history education in relation to nation building, Low-Beer (2003) claims that it is time to change the perception that the main task of history teaching in school is to promote national identity. While it is hardly controversial to refute the claim that nation building should be considered the primary focus of history teaching, the question remains whether it should even be one of its goals at all. Based on the main ideas that have emerged from the literature, two factors that are useful in determining the suitability of nation building being pursued as a goal of history education are the representation of diversity within the task of teaching national history in a plural society and the handling of contentious matters in the nation’s past through history lessons taught in school. This thesis deeply analyses these factors in relation to the Sri Lankan context, with the intention of gaining clarity on how the exercise of nation building is being carried out through history education.

## Conclusion

Whilst discussing the dichotomous effects of education, it was explained at the beginning of this chapter that the current study deals with the conceptual rather than structural aspects of education. The effectiveness of looking at post-conflict education through a development lens emerged from the literature, indicating the need to adopt proactive educational strategies which address the root causes of conflict. This brought up the relationship between education and reconciliation, given that the former is one of the main avenues of promoting the latter. While the teaching of history is an important educational tool in this respect, two aspects of the discipline that could be used for ideological purposes are the curriculum and textbooks. By

closely studying these factors, the current research hopes to gain a better idea of the role of history education in promoting reconciliation in a diverse post-war society such as Sri Lanka.

Necessitated by the politicised nature of representations and their lack of neutrality, some of the primary lines of inquiry of this thesis revolve around the question of how different ethnic and religious groups are represented through history education. The impacts that the misrecognition of groups could have on student identities were also discussed, leading to the suggestion that biased and unflattering portrayals of minorities within the Sri Lankan history curriculum could have negative effects on the identities of minority youth. Zooming in on the Sri Lankan context, the next sub section discussed a few of the main studies that had been undertaken in the past to analyse the promotion of diversity and social cohesion through state educational publications. This revealed that although some of the criticisms that emerged from those studies have now been addressed, many of them are applicable to the current history textbooks as well. This point was corroborated through recent research conducted by Gaul (2014, 2015) on textbooks published from 2007 onwards when history was made a compulsory subject in secondary school. The main allegations levelled through her analysis is that the history textbooks propagate an exclusively Sinhalese-Buddhist national identity, while ‘othering’ the minority communities in Sri Lanka.

The next section of this chapter focussed on the handling of ethnically sensitive matters in history. It first looked at the arguments in favour of teaching contentious historical issues to youth, which included the fact that it could change group perceptions, it could promote effective democratic participation by staying true to the interpretive nature of history, it could facilitate the creation of moral responses to past events, and it could fight the spread of false information within communities. The arguments against teaching sensitive matters were then looked at. These included the possibility of competing external influences interfering with formal education, the need to promote a useable past by focussing solely on the positive aspects of history, the importance of considering the impressionable nature and emotional vulnerability of young students, the continued use of pedagogies that discourage critical thinking, and teacher concerns regarding the handling of sensitive issues. Finally, zeroing in on the Sri Lankan situation revealed a tendency to avoid facing contentious matters in modern history, with neither the conflict nor its causes being meaningfully dealt with in the history syllabus.

The second part of the chapter began by briefly looking at the concepts of ethnicity, religion and nationality that are useful in explaining diversity within a society. This facilitated the discussion on nation building which took place in the last section of the chapter. The scholarship on nation building revealed that it essentially refers to the creation of a national identity, and is particularly relevant to plural societies which may require the formation of a comprehensive national identity among the many competing ethnic identities that already exist. While public education was recognised as an important tool of nation building, specific attention was directed towards the teaching of history. However, the issue of whether history education should be used for the purpose of nation building was up for debate. Although proposing and opposing arguments were analysed, it was difficult to derive a general consensus on the matter from the literature. Nevertheless, the recognition of diversity and the handling of ethnically sensitive matters within national history were identified as useful factors in determining the appropriateness of using history education for nation building.



# 3. Research methodology

## Introduction

This chapter gives a detailed explanation of the methodological foundations of the research. Beginning by introducing the conceptual framework that guides the thesis, the aims of the project are then outlined in order to set the stage for the discussion of the methods of research. After providing an account of the overall research approach, the main body of the methodology is divided into two sections; data collection procedures and data analysis procedures. While the former covers all aspects of fieldwork from the selection of sites and participants to the ethical considerations of the research, the latter covers the entire process of analysis including the examination of textbooks.

### 3.1. Conceptual framework

Having reviewed the global and local literature relevant to the thesis in the previous chapter, it is important to look at how this literature informs and guides the main arguments and aims of the project as well as how it impacts the selection of research participants and methods. Beginning with the premise put forth by Bush and Saltarelli (2000), Smith and Vaux (2003) and Davies (2004), among others, that education should be viewed as part of the problem as well as the solution, it underlies the suspicion raised when explaining how educated youth played an active role in instigating the recent ethnic and religious violence that took place in Sri Lanka. As such, focusing on the teaching of history, this thesis hopes to identify some of the problems associated with formal education that may lie behind the ethnic tensions prevalent in the country, and attempts to understand how they could be transformed into solutions.

As a country recovering from over two decades of war, post-conflict development is a national priority in Sri Lanka. Within post-conflict development, the focus on education in this study stems from the documented importance of considering the relationship between education and conflict not merely in conflict situations but as an aspect of development planning (Smith and Vaux, 2003). Smith's (2009) assertion that the impact of education on conflict is harder to analyse than its inverse and therefore remains an under researched area, highlights a gap that this project aims to fill. In doing so, the ability of education to influence the mindsets and actions of individuals (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000) is taken into account, and the research is

focused on the conceptual rather than structural aspects of education. This feature of education also explains the use of interviews as a research method since attitudes and behaviours of participants can be better analysed through face to face communication rather than written responses.

As the crucial connection between education and reconciliation has been recognised within the post-conflict development agenda (Chapman, 2007; Nicolai, 2009; Paulson, 2011b), the main objective of this thesis is to promote reconciliation through education. Heeding Cole's (2007a, p. 2) advice about viewing reconciliation as "a long-term, multi-layered, and multigenerational process", the research has a youth focus, since it is the younger generation that has a central stake in the country's future. Referring to history education in particular, Cole further notes that although cases of reform in various countries have been extensively documented, not much research has been done on the relationship between history teaching and reconciliation. With this in mind, the current study hopes to explore that relationship in a plural post-war nation like Sri Lanka.

When it comes to pursuing ideological purposes through history education the two main tools utilised are the curriculum and textbooks (Foster, 1999; Smith and Vaux, 2003; Naseem, Arshad-Ayaz and Rodríguez, 2016; Grever and van der Vlies, 2017), which explains the prominence given to them within this research. Bush and Saltarelli's (2000) claim that while the manipulation of history education generally happens purposefully, it could also be unintentional, necessitates a look at the supply side of the discipline along with the demand side. Accordingly, apart from youth, history curriculum developers and textbook writers as well as teachers and other academics are included in the research.

With respect to one of the trickiest aspects of history education in multicultural societies - the representation of diversity, Foster's (1999) questions regarding the content of history, the main players in historical narratives and the methods of portraying the experiences of different groups, form important areas of study in the current project. Global trends in the recognition of diversity through history education are documented by the likes of Steiner-Khamsi(1994), Lall (2008), and Naseem, Arshad-Ayaz and Rodríguez (2016). The applicability of these trends to the Sri Lankan context are also looked at. Moreover, Greaney's methods of identifying nationalistic narratives that ignore diversity are used as guidelines for the analysis of textbooks.

In terms of the impact that the misrepresentation of diversity could have, Amin's (2014) argument that it could be harmful to the development of youth identities lies at the heart of one of the main propositions of this thesis, which is that biased history teaching could have negative effects on the identities of minority youth in Sri Lanka. The theory of adaptive preferences found within the Capability literature is another potential impact of thwarting diversity through the teaching of history. The relevant questions in this regard are whether the minority youth in Sri Lanka have lower expectations of what it means to be Sri Lankan, and whether these are challenged or reinforced through formal history education. Furthermore, it is important to see if the criticisms raised through past studies of state educational publications described by Wickrema and Colenso (2003) are still applicable to the current history textbooks produced by the state. Attempting to corroborate Gaul's (2014, 2015) findings regarding the revised textbooks is also useful.

Several suggestions relating to the subject matter of the interviews conducted through the research can be derived from the literature regarding the teaching of ethnically sensitive matters in history. Gallagher's (1996) suggestion that youth find it easier to understand contemporary issues by understanding the past for instance, is testable through the interviews with young people, where their perceptions of past and present issues could be discussed. In line with the premise that the perceptions of one's own group and other groups could be affected by learning about ethnically sensitive matters (Cole, 2007b), it would be pertinent to examine youth opinions about the factors that led to the Sri Lankan ethnic war. An interesting example is attempting to understand whether the perceptions of Sinhalese youth regarding the discrimination of Tamils in the past has had an impact on their own group identity. Moreover, with regards to the contested role of 'empathy' within history education, Barton and Levstik's (2004) stance that students should be encouraged to display moral responses in relation to the issues and people of the past, is agreed with in this thesis. It is hoped that the discussions with youth would reveal how this stance plays out in reality.

Studies conducted by Conway (2006), Magill et.al. (2009) and McCully (2010) on history teaching in the Northern Irish context greatly inform the current research. The need to investigate the relative importance of formal education among the various sources through which children learn history for instance stems from this work, as does the idea of gaining the

opinions of teachers regarding the handling of contentious matters in history. Given that issues concerning teachers make up a large part of the difficulty in dealing with sensitive subject matter in the classroom (Low-Beer, 2001; Hess, 2004, 2005), it is also deemed necessary to speak to teachers about the challenges they face when teaching history in a plural post-war society and how they overcome them. With respect to the Sri Lankan context, the assertion that modern local history is not effectively dealt with through history education needs to be examined through textbook analysis, supplemented by the views of educational stakeholders such as curriculum developers, textbook writers and other academics.

With respect to the identity concepts discussed in the literature review, the various scholarly definitions and descriptions put forth are helpful in determining how these concepts are viewed in the current thesis. Taking an ethnic group for instance, a combination of elements from three different definitions discussed in the review are used to develop a comprehensive description of it. As such, it is considered to be “a historically defined, self-conscious community, which has its own distinctive history and culture, of which language and religion often constitute important aspects” (Bandaranayake, 1985, p. 4), which is based on a communal belief of a common origin and heritage, supported by similarities in physical appearance (Weber, 1978 cited in Bacal, 1991, p. 13), and which uses any aspect of culture to “create internal cohesion and differentiate themselves from other groups” (Brass, 1991, p. 19). Viewing religious affiliation as one aspect of ethnic identity (Jacobson, 1997), the study hopes to examine the importance placed on it and how it associates with the other identities of youth. The literature shows that theories of national identity and the formation of nations broadly fall into two categories: primordialism and constructivism (Gellner, 1983; Smith, 1987; Eriksen, 2001; Wertsch, 2002). This thesis adopts the constructivist theories and views national identity as a purely subjective construction. It is this belief that guides the research on how nation building is carried out, since nation building is understood to mean the construction of national identity (Alesina and Reich, 2015).

The premise that education plays a key role in nation building (Tawil and Harley, 2004; Lall, 2008) is one of the basic tenets of this research. It also explains the focus on the first goal of education set out by the Sri Lankan Ministry of Education, which involves nation building. The idea put forth by the likes of Grever and van der Vlies (2017) and Conway (2006) that the teaching of history as a subject in secondary school is viewed as an import tool for nation

building, further guides the research. In relation to this, the suitability of pursuing nation building through history education is analysed by taking a closer look at two of the main areas of work dealt with within the discourse on history teaching in diverse post-war societies; the representation of diversity and the handling of ethnically sensitive matters in history.

### 3.2. Overview of research questions and objective

Driven by the overarching objective of promoting reconciliation through education, the present study aimed to understand how the goal of nation building is being pursued through education in Sri Lanka. Focusing on the subject of history due to its relevance to the goal and its ability to influence the attitudes and perceptions of students towards diversity, the investigation strived to answer the following research questions.

1. What type of nation is being built through history education in Sri Lanka?
2. How is the ethnic and religious diversity which characterises the Sri Lankan nation dealt with through history education?
3. How are Sri Lankan youth being aided in understanding the sensitive matters which impeded the nation building exercise in the recent past and resulted in the break out of the ethnic conflict?

By shedding light on the identity politics that affect education in a multicultural post-war society, it is believed that the answers to these questions could be used to explore the reconciliatory potential of history teaching.

### 3.3. Overall research approach

The current study was based on qualitative research and secondary literature. Using a ‘general inductive approach’ described by Thomas (2006), it stemmed from a constructivist paradigm. According to Creswell (2007), instead of beginning with a broad theory, social constructivists aim to build up a pattern of meaning by interpreting how others understand the world. Their reasoning lies in the belief that all knowledge is constructed by the interactions of human beings and their society (Crotty, 1998). Beginning with such a paradigm or worldview, not to mention other assumptions and a conceptual framework, Creswell (2007) explains how a particular problem is tackled through qualitative research. As he states,

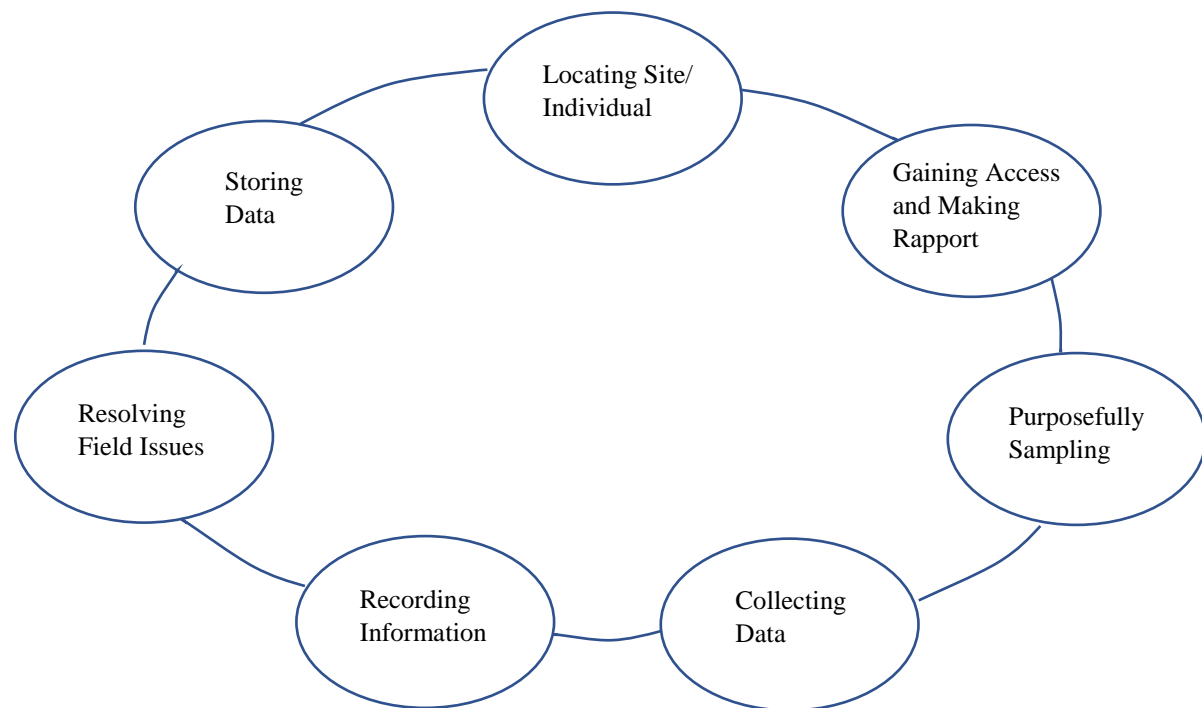
To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a 'complex description and interpretation of the problem, and it extends the literature or signals a call for action. (Creswell, 2007, p. 37)

Creswell's explanation succinctly captures the methodological process that was undertaken in the research project discussed in this thesis, as does Auerbach and Silverstein's (2003, p. 3) description of qualitative research which reads as "research that involves analysing and interpreting texts and interviews in order to discover meaningful patterns descriptive of a particular phenomenon."

Returning to the aforementioned general inductive approach which is utilised in this study, it refers to a method of deriving concepts, themes or a model by interpreting raw data (Thomas, 2006). According to Thomas there are many advantages of using this approach, starting with the fact that its main purpose is to facilitate the emergence of research findings from prominent themes intrinsic to raw data, avoiding the constraints applied by most structured methodologies. It is also a user friendly, convenient, efficient and straightforward method of deriving answers to specific research questions and objectives. Yet, it is slightly weaker than other approaches in terms of model development. However, since developing models is not an objective of this project whereas exploring specific evaluation questions is, the general inductive approach proved to be a good fit for the current study. While it has several similarities to and is in some way a basis of grounded theory, the general inductive approach differs from grounded theory in terms of the technicalities of the coding process. Nevertheless, it follows some of the general guidelines of grounded theory which researchers often use such as coding, memo writing and sampling (Charmaz, 2006). After all, as Charmaz (2006, p. 2) explains, "grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analysing qualitative data to construct theories 'grounded' in the data themselves." Constructing patterns of meaning derived from the extensive data collected through the study is precisely what this research intended to do.

### 3.4. Data collection procedures

Along with document analysis, field research was a main component of the study. A diagram presented by Creswell (2007) given below is extremely useful in introducing the different steps involved in conducting it.



**Figure 5: Data collection activities**

Source: Creswell (2007, p. 118)

While the current study followed the above process, the different steps are grouped under a few subheadings and discussed below.

#### 3.4.1. Selection of research sites and participants

Taking the ethnic and religious focus of the study into account, four different sites of research were chosen. From September to December 2015, research was conducted in the Matara district in the Southern Province, the Mullaitivu district in the Northern Province, and the Ampara district in the Eastern Province, where the population is predominantly Sinhalese, Tamil<sup>32</sup> and Muslim respectively. In terms of religion the population in Matara is predominantly Buddhist

<sup>32</sup> The category of Tamils referred to here are Sri Lankan Tamils. All Tamil participants in the study fall into this category.

and the population in Mullaitivu is predominantly Hindu, while a majority of people in Ampara are followers of Islam. Thereafter, from June to September 2016 research was conducted among a mixed group of participants from the Colombo district in the Western Province, where the ethnic and religious distribution of the population is similar to the national average. The ethnic and religious compositions of the chosen districts are depicted in the tables below and the locations of the districts are shown in the map beneath it.

**Table 7: Ethnic compositions of the population in the districts chosen for fieldwork**

District	Sinhalese %	Tamil %	Muslim %
Matara	94.29	2.57	3.10
Mullaitivu	9.68	88.24	1.97
Ampara	38.88	17.45	43.38
Colombo	76.54	11.16	10.74

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2012 (Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka, 2015a)

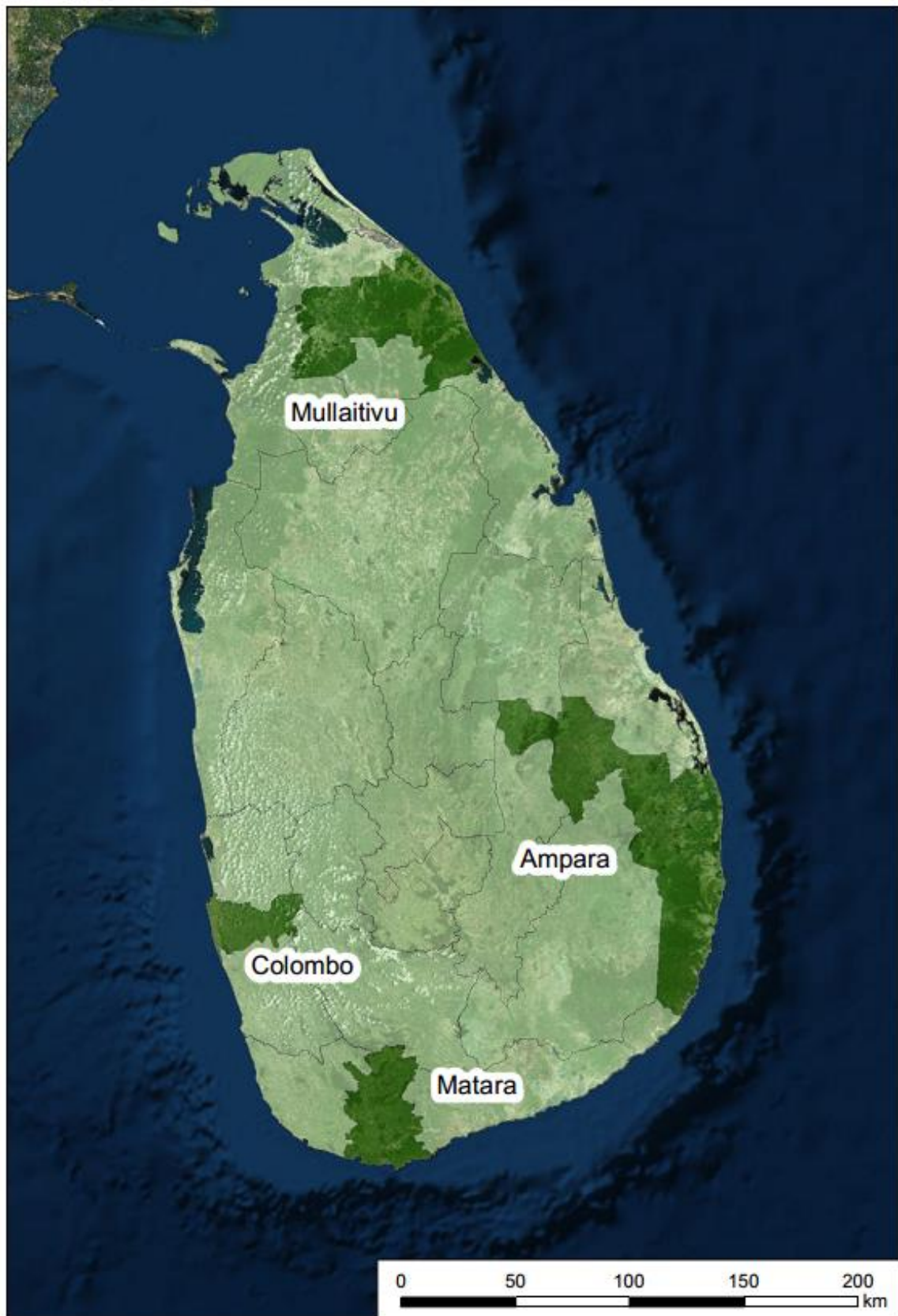
\*Smaller minorities such as Burghers and Malays account for the discrepancies in the totals of the districts.

**Table 8: Religious compositions of the population in the districts chosen for fieldwork**

District	Buddhist %	Hindu %	Islam %	Catholic & Christian %	Other %
Matara	94.14	2.02	3.15	0.69	0.006
Mullaitivu	8.87	75.22	2.04	13.80	0.075
Ampara	38.72	15.83	43.42	2.02	0.005
Colombo	70.22	8.02	11.79	9.87	0.098

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2012 (Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka, 2015a)





The fieldwork component of the study involved interviews with a total of 104 participants.<sup>33</sup> The entire sample was made up of four distinct groups of people, each purposefully chosen to fulfil different research requirements. Once the four groups were identified through purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2007), convenience sampling, which refers to first approaching those who are accessible, was used, along with a touch of snowball sampling, which entails enlarging the sample with others known to the initial convenience sample participants (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003).

#### *Group 1:*

The main respondent group consisted of youth between the ages of 18 and 25. Apart from falling into this age group, the chosen participants had all attended local state schools for their secondary education and had been exposed to the revised history curriculum and textbooks that emerged from 2007 onwards when history was made a compulsory subject in secondary school. The reasoning behind the selection criteria of this group is that as youth who have completed their secondary studies they were likely to have some recollection of the history education they received in school, whilst at the same time being sufficiently removed from it to enable investigations regarding certain impacts it may have had on them. It was also important to choose participants who were mature enough to discuss subject matter that could at times be somewhat sensitive, considering the ethnic and religious tensions prevalent in Sri Lanka.

The overall sample of youth consisted of 81 participants; 20 from Matara, 19 from Mullaitivu, 20 from Ampara, and 22 from Colombo. While the average age of the total sample was 20, the male to female ratio was 43:57. It is worth mentioning however, that gender was not considered a significant factor in this study, which was mainly concerned with the ethnicity and religion of the participants. The ethnic and religious backgrounds of the participants were reflective of the district wise patterns as depicted in the table below.

**Table 9: Ethnic and religious backgrounds of youth participants in the study**

District	Total	Ethnicity				Religion			
		Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	Burgher	Buddhist	Hindu	Islam	Christian
Matara	20	20	0	0	0	20	0	0	0
Mullaitivu	19	0	16	3	0	0	15	3	1
Ampara	20	0	2	18	0	0	2	18	0
Colombo	22	17	2	2	1	15	2	2	3
Totals	81	37	20	23	1	35	19	23	4

<sup>33</sup> The comprehensive participant list can be found in Appendix A.

In the districts of Matara, Mullaitivu and Ampara youth were accessed through an organisation called Sri Lanka Unites (SLU). This organisation, which works as a youth movement, has educational hubs in the chosen districts, providing training in Information Technology, language skills and entrepreneurial skills. As such, these centres are patronised by school leavers who wish to pursue diplomas in the above subjects. With permission from the National Committee of the organisation, youth who attended the centres in the chosen districts were interviewed through the study. Youth in the Colombo cohort were accessed through an educational institute called the General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University (KDU). Once again, the group consisted of school leavers who were attempting to pursue higher educational qualifications and vocational skills in a non-state university.



*The sign outside the Sri Lanka Unites centre in Matara<sup>34</sup>*

<sup>34</sup> These centres are used as reconciliation centres as well as educational hubs which provide lessons in the subjects mentioned above.





*A classroom in the Sri Lanka Unites centre in Mullaitivu*

*Group 2:*

The second group of respondents chosen for the study were secondary school history teachers. They were from the Matara, Mullaitivu and Ampara districts, but not the Colombo district. This is because teachers in those districts are exposed to classrooms with ethnically and religiously mixed student populations, whereas the teachers in Colombo schools are most often only required to teach purely Sinhalese medium classrooms or purely Tamil medium classrooms. Thus, since the study aimed to understand the complexities of teaching history to diverse groups of students, it was decided that it would be sufficient to only speak to teachers from the first three districts. The total sample consisted of 12 teachers; five from two schools in the Matara district, three from a school in the Mullaitivu district, and four from two schools in the Ampara district. The ethnic and religious backgrounds of the teachers are shown in the table below.

**Table 10: Ethnic and religious backgrounds of history teachers in the study**

District	Total	Ethnicity			Religion		
		Sinhalese	Tamil	Muslim	Buddhist	Hindu	Islam
Matara	5	5	0	0	5	0	0
Mullaitivu	3	0	3	0	0	3	0
Ampara	4	0	1	3	0	1	3
Totals	12	5	4	3	5	4	3

*Group 3:*

History curriculum developers and textbook writers, collectively referred to as content creators, made up the third group of participants chosen for the study. They were employed either by the NIE which makes the history curriculum or the EPD which produces the history textbooks. Their involvement in the study was deemed necessary in order to understand the supply side of history education. The total sample consisted of six participants. The ethnic and religious background pattern of this chosen group was reflective of that of the actual curriculum development and textbook writing teams, which predominantly consist of Sinhalese-Buddhists with minimal minority representation. As such the cohort consisted of four Sinhalese-Buddhist participants, one Tamil-Christian participant, and one Muslim participant.

*Group 4:*

The final group of respondents in the study consisted of academics involved with the discipline of history. They were current and retired lecturers and professors of history from different state universities around the country. Their expertise was sought for the purpose of gaining an overall understanding of history education in Sri Lanka and its relationship with nation building and reconciliation. The sample was made up of five academics out of which four were Sinhalese-Buddhists and one was a Tamil-Hindu.

### 3.4.2. Collection of data through interviews

In order to obtain descriptive and reliable information, the semi-structured interview was chosen as the main research tool for fieldwork. All members of the four respondent groups were interviewed, meaning that 104 interviews in total were conducted across three rounds of fieldwork. While specific interview schedules were formulated for each group, they were not strictly adhered to, with respondents being encouraged to freely and openly express their views. The language competencies of all participants were taken into account when conducting the

research, with all three languages spoken in the country, namely Sinhala, Tamil and English, being utilised as necessary. Being the main researcher, I was fluent in Sinhala and English and received language training in Tamil to enable me to have an understanding of all the discussions. However, as my competency in Tamil was not of a sufficient standard to conduct the interviews myself, I hired local Tamil translators to assist in conducting the interviews among the Tamil speaking participants. Each question was asked by me in either English or Sinhalese and translated into Tamil so as to be understood by the participant. Once the participant answered, his/her response was translated back in to English or Sinhalese for my benefit. While the entire conversation was captured on tape, following this process ensured that I could understand the discussion and prompt or probe the respondent as required.

The consent of all participants was secured in writing prior to conducting the interviews. Further details regarding the seeking of consent are discussed under the ‘ethical considerations’ section of this chapter. While there were several similarities in the subject matter of the interviews conducted among the participant groups, the main purposes of the research differed according to each group. When it came to the youth, the interviews aimed to understand their perceptions of the history education received in school and how it has shaped their views and attitudes. As such, the following points were covered in the youth interviews.

1. Sources of knowledge of national history (i.e. formal education, parents and older relatives, popular culture, mass media etc.)
2. Opinions about the purpose of learning history
3. National and ethnic identification
4. Understanding of the role played by their respective ethnic group within national history
5. Perceptions of how their respective ethnic groups are portrayed in the curriculum
6. Perceptions of land entitlement and homelands<sup>35</sup>
7. Reactions towards ethnically sensitive subject matter discussed in the textbooks
8. Understanding of the causes and origins of the ethnic tensions between the Sinhalese and Tamils

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<sup>35</sup> The first-year report of this project contained a section which perused the literature on traditional homelands and their affiliations with ethnic groups and nations; attempting to apply those theories to the Sri Lankan context by broadly hypothesizing about the territorial roots of ethno-nationalisms, as well as by specifically looking at writings that deal with Sinhalese and Tamil contestation over land settlement. However, since the primary data did not reveal any significant findings relating to this topic, it was decided to omit this discussion from the thesis.

## 9. Attitudes towards the said ethnic tensions

A sample of the interview schedule used for the discussions conducted among youth respondents can be found in appendix B. The duration of the youth interviews was approximately 30 minutes.

The interviews with history teachers focussed on three main areas: the history curriculum, pedagogical approach, and the impact of history teaching. Thus, apart from discussing their perceptions of the curriculum and its subject matter as well as nation building through education, the teachers in the study were questioned about the problems they face in teaching history in an ethnically segregated post-war nation, their approaches to teaching this controversial subject, and their opinions regarding the impact and effectiveness of ongoing history education in the country. These interviews lasted for approximately 30 – 45 minutes. A sample of the interview schedule for teachers is available in appendix C. A fourth area regarding the curriculum development process was added to the three areas discussed with teachers, in the interviews conducted among the final two groups of respondents. Moreover, history content creators were particularly questioned about challenges in designing a history curriculum in a diverse post-war society, while the other academics were asked about the potential of using history teaching at the school level to promote reconciliation. The respective interview schedules of the discussions with these two groups of respondents, which were approximately one hour in duration, can be found in appendix D and E.

With the respondents' consent, the interviews were electronically recorded so as to accurately capture the discussions. Upon completion of the interviews, the data was immediately transferred from the tape recorder and stored in the personal computer and drop box folder of the main researcher. All identities of respondents were anonymised through the use of pseudonyms and these were utilised for the naming and storage of files as well as the presentation of data.

### 3.4.3. Methodological limitations

Both foreseen and unforeseen issues were dealt with when conducting field research. To begin with, it was anticipated that the sensitivity of certain topics discussed in the interviews may prevent respondents from providing truthful and comprehensive answers. However, several

measures were adopted to deal with this issue. Using local translators to assist in conducting the interviews for instance helped the respondents to be more familiar with the investigators, thereby putting them at ease and increasing their level of comfort. Getting someone known to the youth participants - the heads of the educational centres in the case of the first three districts and a university administrator in the case of the Colombo district – to introduce the investigators to them and explain the purpose of their visit, was another method of building the trust of these young respondents. Reassuring all participants that the information they provide will only be used for the doctoral research and that their identities will be protected with the use of pseudonyms was another useful method of dealing with this issue.

Furthermore, it could be argued that not taking the academic interests and performance levels of youth into account when selecting respondents for the study could have affected the findings. This is because those who are more interested in the discipline of history or those who are more intelligent in general, may have displayed a greater knowledge of the subject and provided more descriptive answers than the others, although they all learned the same curriculum. However, it was not anticipated that this would be a problem because the aim of the study was to understand the perceptions and attitudes of the youth, rather than to test their knowledge. Thus, it was deemed that a random selection of respondents, which was likely to include both types of students mentioned above, would be suitable for the study.

Another obstacle that was dealt with was the difficulty in gaining access to youth in Colombo. While as mentioned in a previous section, the youth in the Matara, Mullaitivu and Ampara districts were accessed through the Sri Lanka Unites organisation, it was not possible to do the same with respect to the Colombo district since the organisation did not have an educational centre located in Colombo. Fortunately, a professor I was acquainted with through my previous university suggested that I could interview students from the Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, a non-state institution offering higher educational and vocational qualifications, since they fulfilled the selection criteria of the youth target group. He even rendered assistance in acquiring permission from the head of the institute to approach the youth, thereby facilitating a solution to this unforeseen hurdle.

Apart from interviews, the use of classroom observation and focus group discussions as supplementary research methods was considered. However, I ultimately decided against using



either of these methods due to various reasons. To begin with, in terms of classroom observation, obtaining permission from schools proved to be difficult. As such, this method could only be piloted in one school in Colombo, which was the school that I had attended as an adolescent. The exercise revealed that despite being advised to adopt alternative pedagogical approaches in the latest Teacher's Guides, many teachers still followed the lecture method and simply read out the lessons from the textbooks. Moreover, my presence in the classroom was not well received by several teachers, who despite assurances to the contrary, were worried that their performance was being assessed. The usefulness of carrying out classroom observations was minimised by these factors, leading to the decision to omit this research method from the study. With respect to focus group discussions, let alone being difficult to organise, there was a concern that given the sensitive nature of some of the subject matter dealt with, youth would not feel comfortable to openly express their views in a group setting for fear of being judged by their peers. Thus, this method too was not utilised in the study.

#### *Reflexivity of the researcher*

When discussing methodological concerns, it is important to note that as the main researcher, my own identity could have proved advantageous or disadvantageous in terms of the responsiveness of the participants. Being a Sinhalese-Christian means that while I am part of the majority in terms of ethnicity, my religion places me among the minority. However, upon reflection, this hybrid identity seemed to be more helpful than harmful since I had some common ground with each category of respondents. Conversations with the Sinhalese youth for instance flowed easily, and they seemed comfortable around me since I was from the same ethnic group. Meanwhile, the minority youth related to me due to my Christian background, knowing that I too experience some of the same difficulties as them by living in a Buddhist-majority country. Nevertheless, becoming conversant in all three languages spoken in the country was also useful in overcoming identity-based concerns.

My position as a research student from a foreign university received mixed reactions from the participants. The youth respondents gave me a positive reception, with some even seeking my advice on their own educational aspirations for the future. The teachers and academics too displayed positive reactions. When it came to the history content creators however, some of them regarded me with suspicion and doubted my knowledge of the local context due to being educated at a foreign university. This caused a couple of them to adopt a defensive approach

throughout the interview, and evidence of this can be seen in some of their responses discussed in the data chapters of the thesis. Nevertheless, the fact that I had done my undergraduate degree at the University of Colombo somewhat made up for my foreign background in their eyes, with them extending me a friendlier reception upon hearing of it. Thus, when reflecting on my educational background, once again I believe that the local-foreign hybrid helped to minimise the impact it could have had on the responsiveness of the participants.

While conducting interviews, it was challenging at times to keep a straight face and stop myself from reacting when confronted with hostility and racist attitudes. However, my determination to not compromise the objectivity of the research and the quality of the findings, enabled me to do so. The fact that I had anticipated the possibility of facing some opposition and receiving mixed reactions, also helped me to prepare appropriate coping mechanisms or responses and avoid being caught off guard.

Another factor that I was conscious of when interviewing Tamil and Muslim participants from conflict affected areas, was to be sensitive of their backgrounds and political affiliations. So as not to put them in an uncomfortable position at any point during the interview, I consulted the heads of the educational centres as well as the translators and got the list of questions in the interview schedules approved in advance. Understanding the propensity for some youth to still be offended or upset by certain questions, particularly given that they were being posed by a Sinhalese researcher, I refrained from probing or exerting any pressure on the participants to respond.

#### 3.4.4. Ethical considerations

According to Banks and Scheyvens (2014, p. 185) “the research process must ensure the participants’ dignity, privacy and safety, and must ‘give back’ to them in some ways.” The current study adhered to this condition as far as possible. To begin with, all respondents were given an informed consent form outlining the purpose of the project, the methods of research, details about the dissemination of information and their rights as research participants. A sample of the document can be found in appendix F. These forms were made available in all three languages used in the country (Sinhala, Tamil and English) so that respondents could request them in their preferred language, and the information contained in them was verbally conveyed as well. The fact that participation in the interviews was completely voluntary and

even those who decided to participate were free to withdraw their consent at any time and have their responses removed from the dataset, was highlighted. With respect to the youth and teachers involved in the study, prior to conducting interviews, permission to access them was obtained from the relevant gate keepers – the heads of the educational institutes and the principals of the schools respectively – by providing a detailed explanation of the research and its objectives.

In order to make participants feel comfortable to freely express their opinions and to prevent them (particularly the youth) from feeling self-conscious among their colleagues, the interviews were conducted in private on a one-on-one basis. Respondents were also informed of their right to decline from answering any questions they did not wish to comment on. The significance of the aforementioned condition stipulated by Banks and Scheyvens, which is essentially an extension of the ‘do no harm’ principle, was highest in the conflict affected districts where the research was conducted. Thus, when interviewing participants who resided in those areas, any line of questioning that could risk upsetting them or causing them to relive traumatic experiences was avoided.

With respect to confidentiality, as mentioned in a previous section, all identities of respondents were anonymised through the use of pseudonyms. This applied to the naming and storage of files as well, ensuring that the real names of participants could not be revealed. Any pieces of information that were specifically deemed confidential by respondents were not included in the study documents. Permission was requested from participants to electronically record the interviews. Those who granted permission were offered access to the transcripts and the right to request the recorder to be turned off at any point during the interview. Furthermore, all respondents were offered a written summary of the research findings upon completion of the study.

### 3.5. Data analysis procedures

Along with the analysis of the interview data collected through fieldwork, the analysis of history textbooks was a significant component of the research methodology. This section takes a closer look at the ins and outs of textbook analysis in terms of why it was important and how it was conducted, before going on to discuss the overall coding procedures used in the study.

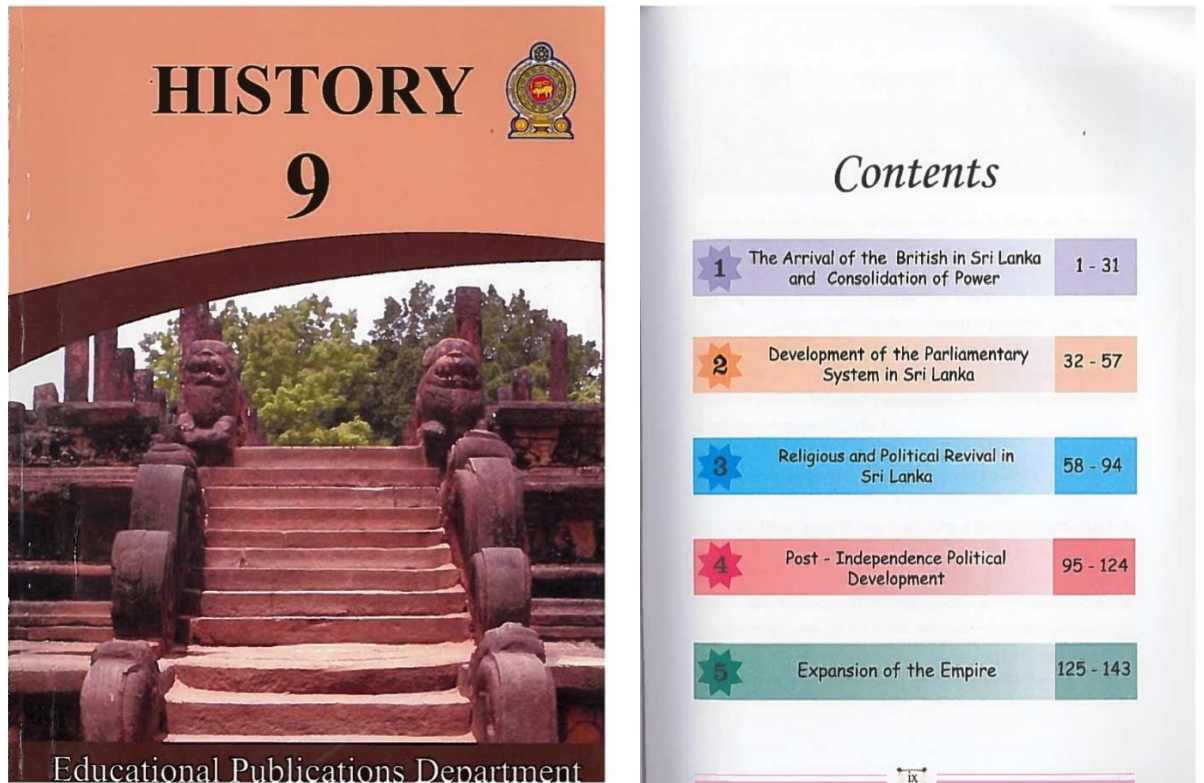
### 3.5.1. Textbook analysis

The importance of conducting textbook analysis in a study of this nature, stems from the importance of the textbook itself as an educational resource. To borrow from Naseem, Arshad-Ayaz and Rodríguez (2016, p. 7), “Few, if any, educational and pedagogical materials shape and condition the worldviews, personalities, and identities of young pupil citizens than the textbooks used in schools and beyond.” Referring to history textbooks in particular, Foster (1999) notes their usefulness in helping students to understand the past, which places them in a pivotal position in classroom instruction. He further mentions their ideological purposes of instilling values, fostering national sentiment and building a sense of identity. The vast amount of time taken up in the classroom by the use of textbooks is another factor that affirms their importance. This is especially true in developing countries where teacher expertise may be low, along with their access to other educational materials, thereby increasing their reliance on textbooks (Greaney, 2006). Focussing the discussion on the Sri Lankan context, Wickrema and Colenso (2003) mention how classroom instruction is still largely teacher-centred despite educational reforms which push for student-centred and activity-based learning. As such, teachers and students rarely stray beyond the scope of the textbooks, thus concretising the influence of textbook content. These arguments serve to emphasise the value of examining textbooks, thereby justifying the use of textbook analysis as a main component of the methodology.

#### *Sample selection:*

Prior to discussing the methods of textbook analysis utilised in the study, Nicholls’s (2003) advice about the importance of defining the sample of textbooks chosen needs to be heeded. The first set of history textbooks that came into circulation from 2007 onwards when history was made a compulsory subject in secondary school, were selected for analysis. Published by the EPD, they are the only officially sanctioned history textbooks used in all state schools across the country. Since secondary school refers to grades 6,7,8,9,10 and 11, the sample consisted of six books in total. While a slightly revised set of books came into circulation from 2015 onwards, there are multiple reasons for selecting this former sample. Firstly, the revised textbooks for all six grades were not published by the time the analysis stage of this project was completed, which means that if these books were included in the study the sample would have been incomplete. Secondly, and most importantly, the 18 - 25 year old youth respondent group chosen for the research were exposed to the former set of textbooks, not the revised ones,

when they were in secondary school. Therefore, in order to maintain consistency in terms of the textbook content discussed in the analysis and the youth interviews, the sample had to be limited to the former set of history textbooks.



*The cover and contents page of the grade 9 history textbook*

History textbooks are originally written in Sinhalese and then translated into Tamil and English. Based on information received from officials of the EPD, the Sinhalese textbooks were deemed to be the most suitable books for analysis since the translations, the English ones in particular, are not always accurate and often contain several errors. The books were accessed through the EPD which sells them at a nominal fee, apart from distributing them to all state schools. In order to ensure that the analysis adhered to the scope of the research, it was necessary to set out certain boundaries in terms of the topics covered within the textbooks. Thereby, the analysis was limited to the following chapters, all of which cover local history.

**Table 11: Selection of history textbook chapters for analysis**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Chapters</b>
6	Chapter 3: The establishment of Aryan settlements in Sri Lanka Chapter 4: Reign of King Pandukabaya Chapter 5: King Devanampiyatissa Chapter 6: King Dutugemunu Chapter 8: Religious centres in the period of the Anuradhapura Kingdom
7	Chapter 3: The fall of the Anuradhapura Kingdom and South Indian influences Chapter 4: Polonnaruwa Kingdom Chapter 6: Sri Lanka after the fall of Polonnaruwa
8	Chapter 1: Upcountry Kingdom Chapter 3: The arrival of the Portuguese in Sri Lanka Chapter 4: Sri Lanka and the Dutch
9	Chapter 1: The arrival of the British in Sri Lanka and the establishment of power Chapter 2: Development of the parliamentary system in Sri Lanka Chapter 3: Religious and political revival in Sri Lanka Chapter 4: Political development in Sri Lanka after independence
10	Chapter 3: From Sri Lanka's prehistoric era to the end of the Polonnaruwa era Chapter 4: The development and demise of the water based civilisation Chapter 5: Sri Lanka from the 13th century to the end of the 15th century Chapter 9: Sri Lanka and Western nations
11	Chapter 1: The consolidation of British power in Sri Lanka Chapter 2: Social and economic changes in Sri Lanka under the British Chapter 6: Sri Lanka after independence

*Research design:*

The research design was informed by the work of four scholars. While Nicholls's (2003) paper titled, 'Methods in school textbook research' was useful in constructing an overall plan, more specific methods and approaches were derived from the work of Pingel (2010), Stradling (2001), and Greaney (2006). Based primarily on qualitative methods, the analysis was supplemented by quantitative methods of a complementary nature.

The quantitative methods consisted of frequency and spatial analysis. The former examined how many times a particular term or name was mentioned, and the latter observed how much space was devoted to a particular topic. In the case of the current study the subject matter of the frequency analysis were the names of the ethnic groups and religions in the country, i.e. Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim, and Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, respectively. The spatial analysis also looked at how much space was devoted to each religion in the textbooks, apart from examining how much space was allotted to Sinhalese kings and kingdoms compared to Tamil kings and kingdoms. While the strength of quantitative methods is that they can point out where the emphasis lies and reveal the selection criteria of textbooks, they do not divulge any information regarding values and interpretation (Pingel, 2010). Offering breadth over depth (Nicholls, 2003), they need to be accompanied by qualitative methods in order to generate comprehensive results.

The qualitative techniques used in the study were a combination of hermeneutic analysis and linguistic analysis. Hermeneutic analysis examines the underlying meaning in texts, looking to unearth hidden messages and discover whether multiple perspectives are offered. Linguistic analysis tries to understand how language is used to characterise messages and create images of people or places, as well as to identify the characters and protagonists of the stories (Pingel, 2010). Adopting Stradling's (2001) penchant for basing an analytical framework on questions, the two methods of analysis discussed above were used to derive answers to the following questions.

- Whose perspective is the text written in?
- What values are transmitted through the text?
- Is there a plurality of perspectives?
- Are contentious matters interpreted in a comparative way?
- Is the text biased (e.g. what adjectives are used to describe different ethnic groups?)?
- Does the content encourage critical analysis and reflection?

Finally, the content of the history textbooks was analysed against criteria laid out by Greaney (2006) to identify texts that do not embrace diversity and tolerance. They are: narrow nationalism, religious bias, omission, imbalance, historical inaccuracy, treatment of physical force and militarism, use of persuasive techniques, and artwork. The examination of Sri Lankan

history textbooks in relation to these criteria was advocated by Aturupane and Wickramanayake (2011) and the World Bank (2011).

### 3.5.2. Process of analysis

Having discussed the details of gathering data through interviews and textbooks, this section explains how all that data was managed and made sense of through the process of analysis. In terms of the interview data, transcribing and translating was the first step. Being the main researcher, I carried out this task myself, so as not to miss any nuances while listening and noting down the responses given by the participants. Once that was completed, the interview transcripts together with the textbook chapters were all uploaded into Atlas.ti, which was the software used to carry out Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS).

Before going into the details of coding, it is important to justify the selection of Atlas.ti from among the several other available data analysis software programmes. According to Lewins and Silver (2014), a distinctive feature of Atlas.ti is that it effectively enables the representation of relationships between concepts. That is, the different associations between codes and/or data segments can be explicitly described and captured through this programme. Moreover, the ease of navigation and retrieval of data according to customised requirements are some of the other benefits of using this software.

Using the terminology of Saldana (2009), two main cycles of coding were carried out, each consisting of multiple code revisions. The first cycle coding methods included provisional, structural, descriptive, in vivo and value coding, while the second cycle coding involved pattern coding.<sup>36</sup> Each code was defined in order to lay out parameters for deciding how and where it should be applied. Once patterns began emerging from the codes, they were categorized or codified into families and memos were written to describe the composition and character of each code family. As such, the composition of the overall code list kept changing throughout the process of analysis, as evident in the examples provided in appendix G. The analysis of such a vast amount of data was greatly helped by certain tools available in the computer software. The network tool for instance facilitated the visual representation of associations between codes, as shown in the diagram found in appendix H. Likewise, the query tool enabled

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<sup>36</sup> For detailed descriptions of each method refer: Saldana, J. (2009) *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Los Angeles, Calif: Sage Publications Ltd.



the customised retrieval of selected codes and the segments of data attached to them. Searches carried out using the query tool could be filtered according to specific respondent groups, as illustrated in the query report given in appendix I. Meanwhile, the Codes-Primary Documents-Cross Tabulation tool enabled the display of data in the form of a table with primary documents as columns and codes as rows, containing either a frequency count for each code or code family per document or document family, or a word count of the coded segments per code and primary document. An example of a crosstabulation table can be found in appendix J. The use of these various tools facilitated the documentation of the analysis, with close and factual descriptions of the codes being written up. This created an understanding of what the data was saying and led to the discovery of the emergent themes.

## Conclusion

The chapter began by setting out the conceptual framework of the thesis, thereby laying the theoretical and methodological foundations of the research. While this justified the focus on education as an aspect of post-conflict development and the emphasis on history teaching in a multicultural post-war society, it also explained the reasoning behind the selection of research participants and methods. Stemming from a belief in the constructivist theories of national identity formation, the interest in nation building through education which characterises the thesis was further elucidated. Thereafter, the overall research objective and questions of the project were outlined.

The next section of the chapter explained that the thesis draws on an inductive approach, using qualitative research and secondary literature. The ins and outs of the research process were then divided into two parts to facilitate a clear and comprehensive discussion. The first part dealt with the procedures of data collection; explaining in detail the fieldwork component of the project including the selection of research sites and participants, the conducting of interviews, the methodological limitations and the ethical considerations of the research. The second part focussed on the procedures of data analysis, starting by describing textbook analysis before going on to the general steps of the analysis process including transcribing, coding, memo writing and identifying themes, to name a few. Overall, this chapter attempted to provide a detailed account of how and why the research was carried out.

## 4. History education and ambiguity of the ‘Sri Lankan nation’

### Introduction

As stated in the introductory chapter of this thesis, the very first goal of education set out by the National Education Commission involves the construction of the Sri Lankan national identity by embracing the multicultural nature of the country. Its first section reads as, “Nation building and the establishment of a Sri Lankan identity through the promotion of national cohesion, national integrity, national unity, harmony, and peace” (National Education Commission, 2003, p. 71). The realisation of the eight specified goals of education including this one, constitutes the National Education Commission’s vision for the education system.

Based on interviews and textbook data, this chapter aims to understand what type of nation is being built through history teaching in secondary school, and the various factors that may affect the nation building exercise. While textbook analysis and findings from discussions with history content creators, teachers and other academics are used in forming such an understanding, youth perceptions regarding nationality are also looked at as a follow up to the nation building discussion in order to identify the patterns of national and ethnic affiliation among youth from different parts of the country. The first section of this chapter explores the opinions of educational stakeholders regarding nation building and the role played by history education in pursuing it, and relates them to scholarly views on the topic. The second section consists of three parts. The first looks at how the ambiguity surrounding the composition of the ‘Sri Lankan nation’ is reflected both in the attitudes of certain content creators and in the material produced by them. The next delves a bit further into the ethnic politics discussed by respondents, which may have a bearing on the task of nation building through education, and the last part relates these findings to the relevant literature. Finally, the third section of the chapter analyses the nationality data of the youth cohort interviewed through this study.

### 4.1. Nation building through education

“Nation building is based on education... we can’t change it. Through education we can build a good nation.” This belief that education is imperative for nation building, expressed by Mr.

Riyal, a Muslim teacher from Ampara, was widely shared among the respondent group. The role played by education in this respect was further expanded by another teacher in the following manner.

Clearly education needs to come first for a cultural harmony to exist. Accepting multiculturalism, respecting other cultures, experiencing peace can only be achieved through education.

(Mr. Imantha, a Sinhalese-Buddhist teacher from Matara)

Moving from education in general to history education in particular, several respondents discussed the unique relationship it has with nation building in terms of the construction of national identity. As articulated by Mr. Mohamed, a Muslim member of the team of writers, “It’s better than all the other subjects... history is the one proper subject there is for that.” Two teachers related this to the creation of the Sri Lankan identity. Using India as an example, one of them explained that although there were many divisions in India, when it came to facing problems all citizens identified themselves as ‘Indians’. She advocated teaching Sri Lankan youth to do the same, by saying,

So, we should be like this. So, promoting that kind of mindset to the students... won’t lead the students to think about their unique identity and discriminate themselves from the other group of people... like the other ethnicity people [sic]. So, they can all think like ‘we are Sri Lankans’.

(Ms. Saakshi, a Tamil-Hindu teacher from Mullaitivu)

According to Mr. Jagath, a Sinhalese-Buddhist teacher from Matara, creating an understanding of what it means to be Sri Lankan is imperative in building the nation. To use his own words, “Now anyway we sit and talk about the idea of being Sri Lankan right... that’s how a nation can be built.”

Taking this further, two content creators held that in terms of building the nation, the main purpose of teaching history was to foster national sentiment or love for one’s country.

Now before we go into the world, we have to love our country, right? That is it. By getting to know our identity, our objective for our children is to create a group of people who love our country... So then amidst that (referring to globalization), to understand

who we are, to love our country, to develop our country... to create a group who think like that.

(Ms. Dissanayaka, a Sinhalese-Buddhist history content creator)

Through history, like I said before, it is to develop national sentiment that the curriculum has been chosen, no? So, that sentiment, it is helpful for the development of the nation, right?

(Mr. Ariyaratne, a Sinhalese-Buddhist history content creator)

However, when it comes to developing national sentiment, one of the academics interviewed in the study held that curriculum developers should be mindful of the multicultural nature of the nation they are attempting to build.

They also must understand that nation building... not Sinhala nation... nation building should be the objective... and must always impart/inculcate knowledge relevant to that.

(Prof. Siriweera, a Sinhalese-Buddhist academic)

Dr. Wijesinghe, another Sinhalese-Buddhist academic, also stressed the importance of adopting a multicultural approach instead of only discussing the proud history of the majority. She further noted that although some people think that Sri Lanka is already a nation-state, it is in fact still in the process of building the nation. She cautioned that when doing so, it is not the majority perspective that should be adopted, but rather a diverse vision through which all ethnicities fit in and feel that they are a part of one nation. Illuminating the importance of the constitution in this respect, she added that nation building should go in line with the constitution since that is what guarantees the security of the nation, the recognition of every ethnicity, and the protection of basic human rights.

These findings reveal interesting points, starting with the fact that educational suppliers, in this case teachers, content creators and other academics, consider nation building to be one of the main goals of education, particularly when it comes to the teaching of history. While many participants take nation building to mean the construction of the Sri Lankan identity, some of them further hold that instilling national love and pride among the youth of the country also falls within its scope.

As shown in the second chapter of this thesis, the link between education and nation building has been explored vastly in the secondary literature. Using the ideas of Weber (1976), Andrews et.al (2010, p. 300) explain why a teaching element needs to be brought in at all, stating, “it is accepted that membership of a national community is not necessarily intuitive, meaning the ‘people’ need to learn or be taught of their membership and the key determinants of its associated national consciousness.” In this respect, helping people to understand who they are and where they come from, requires the teaching of the past. This helps to explain why there was a wide acceptance among the content creators regarding the special role played by the discipline of history in developing national identity. Their claims receive the support of scholars the likes of Phillips (1998) and Barton and Levstik (2004) who discuss the theory that the content and pedagogy of history taught to students directly affects how they see their own and their country’s identities.

The history curriculum is used by states around the world to foster civic and national identity (Stearns, Seixas and Wineburg, 2000; Conway, 2006; Torsti, 2007). Relating to this, many participants spoke of the need to construct a common identity by enabling students to understand what it means to be ‘Sri Lankan’. Some content creators also touted the importance of using history education to foster national sentiment and patriotism. Building a nation in this manner involves the teaching of a national master narrative. Both historical scholarship and school history are actively involved in the formation of national identity through the production of such national narratives (Grever and van der Vlies, 2017). Low-Beer (2003) explains why the teaching of master narratives is seen to be so important among many people. As she holds, it is considered a vital component of ‘our identity’, which means that it is inextricably linked to the promotion of national sentiment. She uses the arguments of Dr. Nicholas Tate, an ardent advocate of using school history to promote a national sense of identity, to elaborate her point. He held that, “A society which is not passionate about its past is in danger of losing its identity” (Tate, 1996 cited in Low-Beer, 2003, p. 4).

However, Al-Haj (2005) discusses the difficulty of fostering patriotism whilst at the same time striving to promote democratic values and multiculturalism. This point was brought up by two academics who cautioned that the multi-ethnic and multi-religious character of the Sri Lankan society should be recognised when building the nation. Within the nation building discussion, these two academics are the only respondents who touched on the dangers of teaching an

exclusive history based on the dominant groups, which according to Gallagher (1996) can create feelings of superiority and prejudice. Thus, the question remains whether nation building should be pursued as a goal of history education. While an emphatic ‘yes’ appears to be the answer offered to this question by the history teachers and content creators involved in the study, it is important to understand how this goal is actually pursued in the Sri Lankan education context and the various influences it is exposed to.

## 4.2. The Sri Lankan nation versus the Sinhalese-Buddhist nation

### 4.2.1. History content creators’ views and their impact on textbooks

The interviews of two of the Sinhalese-Buddhist members of the team of curriculum developers, Ms. Dissanayaka and Prof. Ediriweera, contained several contradictions regarding their views about the composition of the Sri Lankan nation. While they maintained on many occasions that Sri Lanka is a multicultural nation made up of Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims and others, as well as a multi-religious nation made up of Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Christians, on other occasions their statements betrayed their conviction that Sri Lanka was in actual fact a Sinhalese-Buddhist nation. Evidence of this trend can be found by taking a closer look at excerpts from their interviews. As two senior members of the writing team, the impact that their views have had on the content generated<sup>37</sup> can also be seen by looking at the findings obtained through the analysis of the history textbooks of grade 6 – 11.

When discussing the concept of ‘nation’ Ms. Dissanayaka explained the composition of the Sri Lankan nation as follows:

Now we take our country as Sri Lanka. So, the nation is Sri Lankan. So, then the responsibility of each of us is... whether you practice the Hindu religion, the Islam religion, whether you are Buddhist, or if you practice Christianity... it’s our country and nation. So, then overall, we are a Sri Lankan nation.

(Miss Dissanayaka, a Sinhalese-Buddhist history content creator)

She later reiterated her point by saying,

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<sup>37</sup> Another curriculum developer, Mr. Kularatne, noted in his interview that the content of the history syllabus is often largely determined by one or two influential individuals within the development team.

By getting to know our identity, our objective for our children is to create a group of people who love our country..... So, then again, nation means Sri Lankan. So, then all the ethnic groups have joined that.

However, when elaborating on the objective of teaching history, she went on to say,

A child... now anyone... even a Tamil person, even someone who practices Islam... they live in *our* country no<sup>38</sup>... in Sri Lanka. So then, they have to love Sri Lanka. So then, creating someone who loves Sri Lanka is the objective.

Being a Sinhalese-Buddhist herself, the fact that she said, 'they live in *our* country', uncovers her true feelings that Sri Lanka is a Sinhalese-Buddhist nation. In her view, the island belongs to the Sinhalese-Buddhist community and Tamils and Muslims are but 'others' who happen to live there. The history textbooks too are scattered with such statements, which are clearly reflective of the views of those who produce them. In the fourth chapter of the grade 8 history textbook for instance, it is mentioned that the 1766 treaty with the Dutch was considered to be the most unpopular treaty in Sinhalese history by the king and ministers (Educational Publications Department, 2008, p. 91). This is one of the many occasions that lead the student to surmise that it is the history of the Sinhalese nation, rather than the multicultural Sri Lankan nation, that is discussed in the textbooks. This also sheds some light on the question regarding whose perspective the history textbooks are written in.

Certain other statements made by Ms. Dissanayaka contained similar contradictions. Discussing the need to avoid bias when formulating the curriculum, she said the question is,

...how do we supportively work together with everyone for a multicultural society? Then when it comes to certain things, even if incidents have really happened in history, we mention things like that very lightly and make the curriculum in way that that (referring to the multicultural society) is protected. Now actually what we have is a Sinhalese-Buddhist civilization no from the Anuradhapura era, but even there we do not talk about it in a hard way.

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<sup>38</sup> The word 'no' is a colloquialism that is often used at the end of statements. It serves to turn a statement into a question. This colloquialism makes regular appearances in the responses of participants interviewed in the study.

Thus, whilst claiming that it is important to maintain the image of a multicultural society, she insisted that the nation is based on a Sinhalese-Buddhist civilization. In fact, the third chapter of the grade 9 history textbook begins with a section titled, ‘Social and cultural decline under British rule’ and the last point in that section is that with the spread of British politics, religion and culture, Buddhist social values which are tied to the temple started disappearing from society (Educational Publications Department, 2009, pp. 54–55). No such concern was displayed with regard to Hindu social values, although Hinduism is also considered to be one of the ancient religions of the island.

Throughout her interview Prof. Ediriweera stressed the point that there were no ethnic problems in Sri Lanka before the colonial era. Like Ms. Dissanayake, she claimed that everyone lived peacefully, in line with the Sinhala-Buddhist culture of the country.

... what there really was in our country... from the beginning itself what there was in our country is a Sinhala-Buddhist culture. The base of our culture is Buddhist. Then the population... 80 percent... 90 percent... 95 percent were Sinhala. Because of that it is a Sinhala-Buddhist culture that came.

(Prof. Ediriweera, a Sinhalese-Buddhist history content creator)

She went on to explain that since Buddhism is not an expansionist religion but a spiritual way of life, anyone - be it a Hindu or even a Christian - can learn and adopt Buddhism. Owing to the peaceful nature of the philosophy, she maintained that it did not cause any problems. Referring to her fellow countrymen as “we Sinhala-Buddhists”, she said,

... no harm occurred to any of those others in *our* country by *us*. Even though the majority was Sinhala-Buddhist, none of those others... they did not suffer any abuse.

Here, she explicitly referred to the minorities as “others”, arguing that they were never harmed in “*our* country by *us*”, meaning Sinhalese-Buddhists. It is clear that she was narrating history through the voice of the Sinhalese, a practice which is also visible in the textbooks. Another example of this can be found in her description of the arrival of the colonial powers on the island and their relationship with Sri Lankan Muslims.



So, when they came like that to Sri Lanka, there were Muslims in Sri Lanka also. Because there were Muslims in Sri Lanka also, conflicts arose between them. When certain conflicts took place, they tried to exile the Muslims to the coastal areas... to the areas that the Portuguese had captured. Then without letting them get exiled, it was *our* upcountry king who went and settled them in the hill country, in the Eastern areas, in Sabaragamuwa, Kegalle and so on.

The depiction of minorities as ‘outsiders’ in relation to the true Sri Lankans who were Sinhalese-Buddhists, was a recurring theme in Prof. Ediriweera’s interview. Her take on the infamous Elara-Dutugemunu story<sup>39</sup> given below, is a case in point.

A foreign invader was in the North. In the South, it was *our* Sinhala king who was there. He went and defeated that king and saved the country. So then other than that being a battle that was fought against a foreign invader, it was not a battle that was fought by a Sinhalese against a Tamil.

Although she kept referring to King Elara as a foreign invader, Sri Lankan Tamils consider him to be one of their greatest Tamil kings. Thus, by referring to a famous Tamil king as a foreign invader relative to “*our* Sinhala king”, but also maintaining that the battle that erupted between them was not a fight against a Tamil, she was once again blurring the boundaries of the Sri Lankan nation. A similar blurring of national lines was visible in the textbooks when the freedom struggles against the British were discussed. Firstly, in the grade 9 book it is stated that although some people refer to the freedom struggle of 1818 against the British as the Wellassa rebellion or the Uva rebellion, the most appropriate name for it is the ‘first freedom fight of the Sinhale’ (Educational Publications Department, 2009, p. 19). Thus, it is portrayed as a struggle against the British by the Sinhalese nation instead of the Sri Lankan nation. Secondly, although the 1848 rebellion was exclusively referred to as one staged by the Sinhalese for the freedom of the Sinhalese nation throughout the first chapter of the grade 9 book, on the last page of the chapter, it is mentioned that the same struggle can be considered

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<sup>39</sup> According to ancient chronicles such as the *Mahavamsa*, Elara was a Chola prince from South India, who had defeated King Asela of Anuradhapura and peacefully ruled the kingdom for 44 years. King Dutugemunu from the Ruhunu kingdom in the South launched a campaign against him with the intention of restoring and exalting Buddhism. It is acknowledged in the *Mahavamsa* that Elara was a just and humane ruler, and so when he was killed, King Dutugemunu had him honourably cremated and built a stately monument in his memory (Seneviratne, 1997; Grant, 2009).

as the final battle that was carried out by Sri Lankans to save the nation from foreign rule (Educational Publications Department, 2009, p. 26). Nevertheless, Ven. Kadahapola Thero<sup>40</sup> is praised for protecting the whereabouts of Gongalegoda Banda<sup>41</sup>, who was one of the leaders of the 1848 freedom struggle, and he is quoted to have said the following: “The life of Gongalegoda Banda who is fighting for the freedom of the Sinhalese nation is more valuable than mine. So, it does not matter if you kill me. As a Sinhalese, saving the life of Gongalegoda Banda is a great task that I’m carrying out” (Educational Publications Department, 2009, p. 24). What can be understood from all this is that the terms ‘Sri Lankan nation’ and ‘Sinhalese-Buddhist nation’ appear to be used interchangeably in the history textbooks.

Prof. Ediriweera’s self-contradictions regarding the Sri Lankan nation were also visible when she offered her opinion about the passing of the controversial ‘Sinhala-Only’ Act, which is widely considered to be one of the leading factors that led to the ethnic conflict.<sup>42</sup>

... the Sinhala Only Official Language Act... there is nothing wrong in making Sinhala the official language... Why? Because the language of our country’s population is Sinhala. What it says is that only Sinhala is the official language. There is a small shortcoming in making Sinhala the only official language. What is that shortcoming? Since 1945 the education medium in our country was mother tongue or else local languages (Swabasha). So then when you say local language, the language of the Sinhalese is Sinhala, the language of the Tamils is Tamil... like that... because it’s the mother tongue.

While her latter point is valid, it contradicted her former assertion that Sinhala is the language of “our country’s population.” Wording it in this manner gives the impression that the Sri Lankan population consists purely of Sinhalese. Similar contradictions seemed to have filtered through to the textbooks produced by her team. For example, a singular reference to the ‘local language’ is made on multiple occasions in the first chapter of the grade 9 textbook, disregarding the fact that two local languages were spoken in the country. Yet, on one occasion

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<sup>40</sup> See Glossary.

<sup>41</sup> See Glossary.

<sup>42</sup> A detailed description of this act can be found in Chapter 6 under section 6.1. The sensitive matters and their place in the history textbooks.

within the same chapter, it is stated that one of the measures taken by Thomas Maitland<sup>43</sup> to stabilize British power in the coastal areas was to make it compulsory for civil servants to be fluent in either Sinhalese or Tamil in order to be promoted (Educational Publications Department, 2009, p. 7). Casually making a solitary mention of the Tamil language is confusing since the chapter essentially appears to involve the relationship between the British and the Sinhalese community, with no mention about the role of the Tamil community.

Finally, another instance of Prof. Ediriweera defining and redefining the ‘Sri Lankan nation’ a few seconds apart, can be seen in the following excerpt from her interview. It follows an argument made by her that Muslim politicians always show preference to their own kind in terms of employment opportunities and the like.

Prof. Ediriweera: But the allegation is like that... that Sinhala people are given more. But Sinhala people should be given more also no... the majority is us Sinhalese no? ...

Interviewer: Yes, so in the syllabus also there is more Sinhala...

Prof. Ediriweera: It can't not be like that no? *This is a Sinhala-Buddhist country* no.

Interviewer: So, do you think it's enough for a Tamil child and a Muslim child... now everyone learns the same syllabus...

Prof. Ediriweera: When I of course teach I don't think Tamil child, Sinhala child, English child, Muslim child and teach separate things... I of course don't think it's necessary to even mention separately about them in the syllabi. *This is one nation... the Sri Lankan nation.*

This dialogue calls to mind a glaring inconsistency contained in the fourth chapter of the grade 7 textbook. The preservation and promotion of a Sinhala-Buddhist culture is discussed throughout much of the chapter, and King Nissankamalla<sup>44</sup> is lauded for stabilizing the Sinhalese-Buddhist heritage in this country by producing a stone inscription which states that no one other than a Buddhist has the right to the royal throne.<sup>45</sup> However, the chapter ends with

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<sup>43</sup> See Glossary.

<sup>44</sup> See Glossary.

<sup>45</sup> This stone inscription is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5 under section 5.2. Reactions to culturally sensitive material.

a bullet point stating that one of the striking features of the Polonnaruwa period was the building of a common national culture through a friendly, mutual trust between various ethnic groups (Educational Publications Department, 2007a, p. 116). Such contrasting statements which often appear towards the end of lessons, can almost be seen as afterthoughts that are included for the purpose of deflecting any criticisms regarding ethnic bias. Nevertheless, content such as the following poem that is included in the grade 9 textbook (Educational Publications Department, 2009, p. 14) betrays the half-hearted attempts made by these two content creators to maintain that Sri Lanka is a multicultural nation.

As long as I remember the brave Sinhala nation,  
As long as I have my great royal blood,  
I'll never shed tears  
So, Goodbye my honoured Mother Lanka.

#### 4.2.2. Further reflections on ethnicity and religion

The topics of ethnicity and religion received considerable mention throughout the interviews with all participant groups. With respect to the content creators, while this discussion was once again dominated by the same pair of respondents who displayed a habit of equating the Sri Lankan nation to the Sinhalese Buddhist nation; as two of the most influential individuals in the team, it can be argued that their views may have an impact on how the task of nation building is being carried out through history education. As such it is interesting to take a look at some of their main arguments, beginning with their stance on the present status of the Sinhalese.<sup>46</sup> They held that currently, it was the Sinhalese majority who were discriminated against within the Sri Lankan society. Speaking about one of the contentious issues that are believed to have contributed towards the ethnic conflict, university standardization, Ms. Dissanayake said the following.

It's like this. Now some people have falsely raised things like that. Falsely raised. Now look even today... now if you look at university entrance it isn't unfair in any way

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<sup>46</sup> It is useful to mention at this point a suspected cause found in the literature for the sense of threat felt by the Sinhalese majority with respect to the minority populations. As Perera (2009) and Bush and Saltarelli (2000) explain, compared to the Tamils, the Sinhalese have no regional presence in South Asia, despite forming the ethnic majority within the small island of Sri Lanka. Their language and culture too can only be found within Sri Lanka. As such, ironically, the Sinhalese majority are thought to suffer from a 'minority complex'.

whatsoever, right? Now sometimes it becomes unfair for Sinhala people. Now that is, the number is more, so then the amount that is taken is less. Now when you take our jobs also, now when they give us scholarships also they make ethnic considerations. Now this time they chose from the NIE as to how many people will go for PhD from here. So, then they divided it according to the Tamil, Muslim ratio also. So, then Sinhala people, even if there were more talented Sinhala people, they are put aside... they are removed from the list. Why? To give those people a place.

(Ms. Dissanayake, a Sinhalese-Buddhist history content creator)

This trend of initially proclaiming that there is no ethnic problem in Sri Lanka and then claiming that the Sinhalese population is comparatively disadvantaged, was repeated by Prof. Ediriweera when she said,

... among the general public people have adopted those religions and besides carrying out their livelihood and living, they don't fight for their religion, ethnicity, caste... things like that. It's these politicians who make everything... actually speaking... based on the situation that has arisen, in our school books... if actually writing, we should write about Buddhists more, about Sinhalese more. Why? Because now they are the ones who get harmed by others. They are the majority... now... we can't talk at all no about our ethnicity, about our religion... we are very scared to say Sinhala-Buddhist. But people in other religions... look at how they come forward and say it. So, because of that, actually what has happened now is discrimination has happened to the majority.

(Prof. Ediriweera, a Sinhalese-Buddhist history content creator)

This argument gives rise to the question of whether the history curriculum written by the professor and her team, overcompensates in terms of the magnitude of Sinhalese-Buddhist history it contains, in order to offset this perceived discrimination against the majority. However, despite sharing this view, throughout her interview she maintained that there were no ethnic issues in Sri Lanka. Starting with her initial point that until the arrival of the Portuguese, Sri Lanka was completely free of ethnic problems, she later went on to say that,

Actually, there is no ethnic issue in our country. Now don't we have the same problems that Tamil people in Jaffna have? Don't the people here... don't Sinhala people have them? Don't Tamil people have the same problems Muslim people have? Don't we

have them? That means, unemployment. So then uh... it is not an ethnic issue that there is in our country, it's an economic issue.

Relating this to the writing and teaching of history in secondary school, she maintained that,

So, because of that there is nothing in the books in a way that could bring about national disunity. About national unity... there is also no particular focus on national unity. The concept of national unity is there in our country. That means, even though politicians and some of those people who want to get more power have seen that there is national disunity and various things are going forward, the general population of our country... school children... there is no ethnic disunity whatsoever among them all.

She further spoke of the futility of discussing ethnic differences.

So, when talking about an ethnic reconciliation, why should we talk about the differences or inequalities of those ethnic groups? I don't think it is even necessary to talk about those.

However, she herself then went on to discuss the economic issues mentioned above and in doing so she highlighted a difference between Sinhalese and Muslims by reworking an example in the following manner.

So then let's say we go to a Sinhala Minister... our Sinhala ministers of course don't do that... if we are taking it as an example we have to take a Muslim minister. Now a Muslim minister... the Muslim minister tries as much as possible to give the job to Muslim people.

Thus, it can be observed that her interview is strewn with conflicting arguments. She claims that ethnic disparities do not exist in Sri Lanka, while at the same time speaking of Sinhalese discrimination. She also shoots down the need to focus on ethnic differences, but highlights them when using an example to prove the very same point. Moreover, given the recent spate of violence that has taken place among members of the general public relating to ethnic tensions, particularly the incidents led by Sinhalese-Buddhist extremists, it seems disingenuous

to claim that Sri Lanka is free of ethnic issues. What can be surmised from this entire discussion is that some of the most influential people involved in the development of the history curriculum and textbooks, have certain controversial and at times chauvinistic views on ethnic politics both past and present, apart from being conflicted about the composition of the very nation they are attempting to build through history education.

#### 4.2.3. Situating the argument in the literature

Building on Gellner's (1983) premise that nation building involves attempts by ruling elites to bring about the intersection of political and national units, Mylonas, Lawrence and Chenoweth (2000) hold that a common national identity is formed and applied in order to do that. In their view, given that legitimacy in modern states is tied to majoritarian rule, nation building involves the creation of majorities. The conflation of Sri Lankan and Sinhalese-Buddhist identities that was brought out through the primary data makes his claim applicable to the nation building exercise that is being carried out through history teaching in Sri Lanka. Broadening the discussion to the entire region, Nair (2010) explains that unlike the West, Asian countries started their nation building campaigns "by resorting to old fashioned appeals of naked ethno-nationalist sentiment". She further noted that Asian nationalisms are not purely invented, but rather have primordial roots, and the ethnic and cultural consciousnesses that stem from them are shared with the younger generation through textbooks. Expanding on the power of ethno-nationalism, Connor (1993) claims that its effectiveness lies in the mere belief by members of a nation that they are ancestrally related or share common descent. It is the bond created by this belief that brings about the notion of 'us and them' (Triandafyllidou, 1998), which, as the primary data showed, received frequent mention during the interviews with certain content creators.

This dichotomous feature of national identity has been explored deeply by Triandafyllidou (1998) in a paper in which she postulates that national identity can be thought of as an inward-looking self-consciousness of a community. Most importantly, she argues "that the identity of a nation is defined and/or re-defined through the influence of 'significant others', namely other nations or ethnic groups that are perceived to threaten the nation, its distinctiveness, authenticity and/or independence" (Triandafyllidou, 1998, p. 594). Thus, significant others could be external parties such as foreign nations or internal parties such as ethnic minorities or immigrant communities. Some of the points of discussion related to ethnic politics which came out through the interviews with certain Sinhalese members of the writing team, shed light on

how and why those in majority populations sometimes feel threatened by minorities and thereby relegate them to the side-lines of their national narratives. Nevertheless, although such master narratives are exclusive in nature since they define who belongs to the nation and who does not, their boundaries are not fixed and could be challenged by those who feel excluded from the national story (Amin, 2014).

Elaborating on the interplay between identity politics and nation building, Bandaranayake (1985, p. 1) writes that factors relating to history and ethnicity have generally played a significant part in the formation of modern nations since they constitute “an integral aspect of the ‘national question’”. He goes on to note the conflicting nature of ethnic self-identity and self-consciousness in the developing world,

...where a progressive nationalism is often intertwined with backward forms of national chauvinism, communalism, casteism, and tribalism – the one contributing to the struggle against colonialism and foreign domination and the other activating internal strife and the oppression of minorities.

(Bandaranayake, 1985, p. 2)

Believing that teaching history free of myths and ethnic bias can greatly contribute towards the building of an integrated, multicultural nation, Bandaranayake addresses many of the popular distortions and misconceptions of Sri Lankan history in his article, which traces the origins of the main ethnic groups of the island. His explanation regarding the dichotomous forms of nationalism that exist in developing nations is reminiscent of Greaney’s (2006) concept of ‘narrow nationalism’, which is one of the many factors identified in history textbooks that promote nationalistic agendas. The unquestioning love for the Sinhalese-Buddhist nation that is transmitted through Sri Lankan history textbooks, place them within this category. Explaining why this is problematic, Manor (1984, p. 3) states, “The chauvinistic view of the Sinhalese majority as a ‘nation’, indeed as *the* nation, stands in clear contradiction to the concept of Sri Lanka as a modern, pluralistic nation-state.”

An item of literature that specifically deals with the Sri Lankan context and encapsulates the findings discussed above is a paper by Gaul (2015) titled, ‘Security, Sovereignty, Patriotism – Sinhalese Nationalism and the State in Sri Lankan History Textbooks’. In it she distinctively captures the Sinhalese ethno-nationalist historical narrative that is perpetuated through the textbooks and used for the purpose of constructing the Sri Lankan national identity. In eloquently summarising the main arguments of her paper, she states that,



It discusses how an exclusively Sinhalese claim to sovereignty in Sri Lanka is constructed through the following three major justification strategies. First, the construction of the Sinhalese as the sole nation of Sri Lanka through the language and storylines of the textbooks. Second, the ethnocentric and chauvinistic construct of nationhood within a selective historical narrative that accentuates Buddhism. Third, the portrayal of ‘others’ as a constant threat to the nation that can only be averted within a unitary Sinhalese-Buddhist state.

(Gaul, 2015, p. 2)

In explaining Sinhalese hegemony over the conceptualisation of the nation, Gaul (2015) describes exactly what is highlighted in the analysis above, regarding the interchangeable use of the terms ‘Sri Lankan’ and ‘Sinhalese’. She elaborates that the past rulers of the country for example, are referred to as Sinhalese kings and Sri Lankan rulers within the same stories. She goes on to assert that in terms of language and in the context of local history, no distinction is made between national, religious and ethnic labels, which means that the Sinhalese are given free rein to dominate the Sri Lankan national identity. Gunewardena (1985) too, notes that contemporary Sinhalese ideology has strikingly altered the perception of local history during the last century.

Another point made in Gaul’s paper is that certain prominent personalities and events are often used to construct the definition of nationhood within the textbooks. An example of this can be found in the grade 9 textbook analysed in the present study, in which there is a quote by Anagarika Dharmapala<sup>47</sup>, who is hailed as a Sri Lankan hero, which starts off asking the readers to strive to do great things for their nation and religion every day and ends by saying that they should often strive towards the development of the Sinhala nation and Buddhism (Educational Publications Department, 2009, p. 64). Clearly the nation that is defined through this example is one that is exclusively comprised of Sinhalese-Buddhists. Many other examples like this from the textbooks were used in the previous section to further prove the ambiguity surrounding the Sri Lankan nation. However, unlike Gaul’s paper which is solely based on textbook evidence, the current research also looked at the perceptions of those who produce the books. Given that similar studies which incorporate textbook analysis with stakeholder views are hard to come by, this study makes a unique contribution to the current topic.

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<sup>47</sup>See Glossary.

### 4.3. National and ethnic affiliations of youth

The code family analysed in this section labels youth respondents' answers to the query, 'If you were asked the question "what is your nationality", what is the first answer that comes to your mind?'. Interviewees who were slow to offer a response were probed further as to whether they think of themselves first as Sri Lankans or Sinhalese/Tamils/Muslims etc. The purpose of this investigation was to understand the strength of youth affiliation to their country and their ethnicity and/or religion.

From the total sample of 81 youth, 59 percent mentioned 'Sri Lankan' as their nationality while the remaining 41 percent gave responses consisting of both their country and ethnicity or only their ethnicity and/or religion. This moderate figure does not open itself up to claims of the existence of either a strong or weak Sri Lankan identity in the country as a whole. The district level data however, tells a different story. The Sri Lankan identity was strongest in the Ampara district with 75 percent of youth naming 'Sri Lankan' as their nationality. Colombo followed closely with 73 percent doing the same. The corresponding figure in Matara, which was 55 percent, resembled the national average. Mullaitivu on the other hand, depicted a weak Sri Lankan identity with only 32 percent of the sample claiming that their nationality was Sri Lankan.

The contrasting results obtained from the two minority districts raise interesting questions. With respect to the Muslim youth from Ampara, there is an uncertainty as to whether their responses reflect their actual or desired national identification. The reason behind the ambiguity is that responses obtained from this group to some of the other interview questions revealed a strong desire to belong to the country, even at the expense of ignoring or suppressing certain forms of discrimination. Thus, although they may have a stronger affiliation to their ethnic group, many Muslim youth from Ampara may wish to see themselves primarily as Sri Lankans. In fact, two youth who claimed that Muslims do not receive all the rights that other Sri Lankans do, still chose to identify themselves as Sri Lankans first.

The most common answer regarding nationality received from the Tamil youth in Mullaitivu was ‘Sri Lankan Tamil’.<sup>48</sup> Many participants explained that they responded with their ethnicity for the purpose of differentiation. That is, they felt the need to differentiate themselves from other Sri Lankans by naming their ethnicity. This begs the question as to why many Northern Tamil youth do not find the ‘Sri Lankan’ label suitable to capture their nationality. Is it because they feel that the term Sri Lankan is associated with the Sinhalese majority or is it because they feel like they belong to a separate nation? The explanation provided by one youth who shed the Sri Lankan label altogether and identified himself purely as a Tamil, was conveyed by the translator as follows.

When it comes to India everyone is kind of like treated equally so they are telling that they are Indians [sic], but when it comes to Sri Lanka after the war they feel like more comfortable saying Tamil than saying Sri Lankan.

(Lokesh, 24 year old Tamil-Hindu male)

Overall, 13 out of 19 or 68 percent of youth in the Mullaitivu cohort chose to identify themselves primarily as Sri Lankan Tamils, Tamils, or Tamil-Muslims, rather than as Sri Lankans.

While the mixed group of respondents from the Colombo district displayed a strong affiliation to their Sri Lankan identity, the 6 (out of 22) youth who did not choose to name ‘Sri Lankan’ as their nationality were all Sinhalese. Five of these participants identified themselves purely as Sinhalese and the sixth as a Sinhalese-Buddhist. This tendency to substitute one’s nationality with one’s ethnicity was much stronger among the purely Sinhalese-Buddhist contingent from Matara, with 45 percent following the trend. This may indicate that a significant proportion of the majority have a stronger sense of affiliation to their ethnic group than to their nation. Or else it may indicate that many majority youth equate being Sinhalese to being Sri Lankan.

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<sup>48</sup> As mentioned in the methodology chapter, all Tamil participants in the study were Sri Lankan Tamils as opposed to Indian Tamils. It is important to bear this in mind when reading the remaining data chapters and conclusion of the thesis.

## Conclusion

The importance that history teachers and content creators place on education as one of the main methods of nation building was revealed in the first section of this chapter. With respect to the teaching of history, while most believed that it was imperative in constructing the Sri Lankan identity, a few respondents further maintained that it should also be used to instil national love and pride among Sri Lankan youth. The views of these participants support the arguments of scholars who favour the use of history education for the purpose of nation building. However, as the review of literature showed, there is also a body of work written in opposition to it. This brought up the need to view the exercise of pursuing nation building as a goal of history education through a more critical lens, focusing on how it takes place in reality and the impacts it faces. What was discovered in the Sri Lankan case in this respect, was that certain prominent individuals involved in the formation of the history curriculum seem conflicted about the composition of the nation they are attempting to build, and this discord has filtered in to the textbooks produced by them, thereby creating an ambiguity regarding the ‘Sri Lankan nation’.

To conclude, this chapter has painted a picture of how the exercise of nation building is attempted through history teaching in Sri Lanka. By exploring the content of the history textbooks as well as the views of educational stakeholders involved in the preparation and delivery of history education, the study has shed light on the influences that feed into this attempt and their resulting impact on the exercise itself. It has also uncovered interesting findings regarding the national and ethnic affiliation patterns of youth from different parts of the country, revealing how they sometimes mirror the trends displayed through history education.

# 5. The recognition of diversity through history education

## Introduction

Following on from the discussion in the previous chapter regarding the composition of the ‘Sri Lankan nation’, this chapter takes a closer look at the different peoples that constitute it. The analysis focuses on the second part of the first goal of education involving the construction of national identity, which reads as, “recognising cultural diversity in Sri Lanka’s plural society within a concept of respect for human dignity” (National Education Commission, 2003, p. 71). The aim of the chapter is to understand how the ethnic and religious diversity which characterises the Sri Lankan nation is dealt with through history education as well as how it is perceived by educational stakeholders.

Divided into two parts based on the sources of primary data, the first section of this chapter investigates the portrayal of the main ethnic groups in the country. Focussing on a specific question posed to the participants of this study, the next section attempts to supplement the diversity discussion with insights regarding the treatment and perception of ethnically sensitive material. The final section links the data analysis to the relevant literature that has been reviewed in this thesis.

## 5.1. Portrayal of ethnic groups

### 5.1.1. Textbook findings

As explained in the Methodology chapter, the original textbooks of grade 6 – 11 that were published in 2007 when history became a core subject in secondary school, were analysed through the study. One of the main topics which were investigated was the portrayal of the different ethnic groups and religions in Sri Lanka in terms of their respective origins, histories and imageries. This section explores the findings that came out in that respect. Apart from highlighting certain recurrent themes that emerged throughout the history lessons, the textbook analysis served to answer several questions regarding the content and intrinsic qualities of the text in relation to perspective, values and bias.

### *Ethnic origins*

One of the introductory chapters in the grade 6 textbook (Educational Publications Department, 2006a) is titled, 'The establishment of Aryan settlements in Sri Lanka'. It explains that Aryan people who lived in central Asia came across the Hindukush mountain range and settled in India, after which some of them travelled from North India to create settlements in Sri Lanka. The *Mahavamsa* is cited as the source of this story. Although it is acknowledged that scholars have presented many theories regarding the creation of settlements in Sri Lanka, only the Aryan theory is explored in the history lesson. It is stated that the leader of the first group who created these Aryan settlements on the island was Prince Vijaya<sup>49</sup>. The story goes that he arrived in Thambapanni along with 700 followers and met Kuveni, a native woman belonging to the Yaksha tribe. The other tribe in the country at the time was the Naga tribe. With the help of Kuveni, Vijaya is said to have murdered a significant number of Yaksha tribesman who were attending a wedding on the day he arrived, and taken over the rule of their kingdom. Although the textbook does not mention anything about ethnic groups at this stage, the Aryan myth is connected to the popular Arya Sinhala concept whereby it is believed that the Sinhalese are the purest Aryan and the aforementioned story is their tale of origin in Sri Lanka. However, as explained by the renowned historian Prof. Siriweera who was interviewed through this study, the Arya Sinhala myth has been debunked in numerous books and articles written in India and the West. Yet, starting from the 20th century, it continues to appear in school textbooks, a practice which, according to him, "has to change."

Another point of contention regarding the Vijaya-Kuveni story is that Sinhalese as well as certain Tamils<sup>50</sup> tend to claim it as their respective tale of origin on the island. This trend was visible among many youth participants interviewed in the study. A likely reason behind this is the absence of clear information regarding Tamil roots in Sri Lanka. The first mention of Tamils appears in the 6th chapter of the grade 6 book (Educational Publications Department, 2006a), where it says that King Elara brought a Tamil army and came to Sri Lanka from the Soli kingdom, killed King Asela<sup>51</sup> who was ruling Anuradhapura at the time, took over the kingdom and ruled it for 44 years. Nothing more is said about the origin of Tamils. However, since it is mentioned on multiple occasions in this chapter that King Kavantissa<sup>52</sup> and his son

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<sup>49</sup> See Glossary

<sup>50</sup> The category of Tamils referred to in this context are Sri Lankan Tamils.

<sup>51</sup> See Glossary

<sup>52</sup> See Glossary

King Dutugemunu<sup>53</sup> made efforts to save the country from Tamil rule, there is an implicit implication that Tamils were foreign invaders from the Soli kingdom. It could be argued that this story is clearly narrated from the perspective of the Sinhalese, since they are differentiated from the invading Tamils. Furthermore, the third chapter of the grade 7 textbook (Educational Publications Department, 2007a) describes the South Indian influence on Sri Lanka and the fall of the Anuradhapura kingdom. It explains the types of relationships that Sri Lanka had with South Indian nations and how and why many people from those kingdoms ended up on the island. Although it is never explicitly stated that Tamils are descendant from these South Indians, on some occasions the invaders are referred to as Tamils, such as in one instance where it states that several Tamil leaders who came to Sri Lanka during the reign of King Mittasena<sup>54</sup> usurped power and ruled the country for 27 years. The next chapter goes on to say that the Chola<sup>55</sup> people who captured Sri Lanka moved its capital from Anuradhapura to Polonnaruwa, adding that the change of the capital was upheld by the Sinhala kings who chased out the Chola people. It further explains how the Sinhala Army was eventually able to defeat the Chola forces. Thus, once again the ambiguity regarding Tamil ancestries is perpetuated by referring to local people and leaders as Sinhalese, sans any mention of Tamils. When it comes to Muslims too, the textbooks fail to include any information regarding their origins in Sri Lanka. Rather, they are nonchalantly introduced into the historical narrative during the colonial era, by claiming that the Muslims living on the coast tried to chase out the Portuguese who arrived on the island (Educational Publications Department, 2008).

### *Religion*

With respect to religion, the first mention of Buddhism appears as early as in the fourth chapter of the grade 6 textbook (Educational Publications Department, 2006a), where certain factors that indicated the existence of people who followed Buddhism during the time of King Pandukhabaya<sup>56</sup> are explained. The following chapter goes on to reveal how Buddhism was officially introduced to Sri Lanka during the reign of King Devanampiyatissa<sup>57</sup>, thereby making him the first Buddhist king of Sri Lanka. Hinduism is mentioned for the first time in the eighth chapter of the same book. It states that apart from Buddhism, there is evidence that certain other religions existed in the country during the Anuradhapura period, Hinduism being one of

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<sup>53</sup> See Glossary

<sup>54</sup> See Glossary

<sup>55</sup> See Glossary

<sup>56</sup> See Glossary

<sup>57</sup> See Glossary

them. Five pages of the chapter however are dedicated to Buddhism with only three quarters of a page being used to describe the other religions that were present in that time. When considering the entire grade 6 book, 14 pages are devoted to Buddhism. While a bit more prominence is given to Hinduism and some attention is directed towards Islam and Christianity in later lessons, the dominance of Buddhism is apparent throughout the history curriculum. In fact, a simple frequency analysis of the names of religions in the history textbooks of grade 6 – 11 revealed that the term Buddhism appeared 267 times, compared to the terms Hinduism, Christianity and Islam which appeared 78, 76 and 8 times respectively.

Moreover, the protection and promotion of Buddhism is one of the values that are clearly transmitted throughout the history curriculum. While the grade 10 textbook (Educational Publications Department, 2006b) explicitly states that the duties of a king were to protect the citizens and Buddhism, one of the main ways that kings are judged within the lessons is through their service towards the upliftment of Buddhism. In the first chapter of the grade 8 book (Educational Publications Department, 2008) for example, King Keerthi Sri Rajasinha<sup>58</sup> is portrayed in a favourable light because despite being a Hindu worshipper, he was a king who performed a tremendous service for the development of Buddhism. Likewise, in other lessons King Nissankamalla was hailed for making a stone inscription which states that none other than a Buddhist is fit for the royal throne (Educational Publications Department, 2007a) and Sri Sumangla Himi<sup>59</sup> was praised for bravely participating in the freedom struggle, with the aim of gaining independence for the nation and enabling a Sinhalese-Buddhist to become king (Educational Publications Department, 2009). The grade 9 book (Educational Publications Department, 2009) also states that Anagarika Dharmapala should earn the respect of all Buddhists for saving Buddhagaya - an extremely sacred place for Buddhists - by fighting against Hindu priests and the British government. Students are thereby taught that protecting and promoting Buddhism, even if it involves battling with other religions, is an action that should be valued and respected. The message delivered regarding Christianity throughout the history syllabus on the other hand, is very different. Christianity is portrayed in a negative light throughout the textbooks. When describing the religious debates that took place in the latter part of the 19th century, it is stated that Gunananda Himi<sup>60</sup> made the Buddhist population proud and weakened the Christian ministers. It is later stated that he defeated the Christian priests and

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<sup>58</sup> See Glossary.

<sup>59</sup> See Glossary.

<sup>60</sup> See Glossary.



confirmed the truthfulness of Buddhism. This trend of discussing Christianity in competitive terms vis-à-vis Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam, is visible throughout the text.

### *Representation of minorities*

There is a clear imbalance in the amount of information contained in the history curriculum regarding Sinhalese-Buddhists and the minorities. Taking the grade 6 book (Educational Publications Department, 2006a) as an example, despite having entire chapters dedicated to most of the Sinhalese kingdoms and kings, the Tamil kingdom of Jaffna is only featured on the last one and a quarter pages of the final chapter. The twelve kings who ruled Jaffna are mentioned in name only, with the shortage of information being blamed on the lack of credible sources. Although there is a trend of using flattering adjectives such as courageous, steadfast, intelligent, charitable etc. to describe most Sinhalese kings, similar treatment is only given to the renowned Tamil King Elara with respect to Tamil leaders. In addition, the positive account of this Tamil king who ruled the kingdom of Anuradhapura for 44 years is only presented in point form on half a page, while entire chapters are devoted to the merits of prominent Sinhalese kings, even those who had much shorter reigns.

Furthermore, the Sinhalese kings Kavantissa and Dutugemunu are hailed as exceptionally great leaders for their successful efforts to unite the country by saving it from Tamil rule, meaning the rule of King Elara. Thus, although it was acknowledged that King Elara was a just and respected ruler, he was still portrayed as an outsider from whom the country needed to be regained. Similarly, in the grade 10 textbook (Educational Publications Department, 2006b), saving the country from Tamil rule and stabilizing kingship is mentioned as an important political service carried out by King Dathusena<sup>61</sup>. These points implicitly suggest that Tamils were not considered part of the Sri Lankan nation. Turning to the Muslim minority, when describing the displeasure of the local people regarding the building of a trading house in the Kotte kingdom by the Portuguese in the grade 8 textbook (Educational Publications Department, 2008), the Muslims and the Sinhala population are mentioned separately. Throughout the chapter Muslim people are simply referred to as Muslims, never as the Muslim population. This conscious effort to differentiate people based on their ethnicity instead of grouping them together as the local population, serves to depict Muslims too as outsiders.

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<sup>61</sup> See Glossary.

### 5.1.2. Participant voices

As explained in the research methodology, 81 youth from four different districts, each of which was chosen based on its ethnic composition, were interviewed through this study. Twelve history teachers from three out of the four chosen districts were also interviewed, as were staff from the NIE and EPD who were a part of the history curriculum development and textbook writing committees, as well as other academics working in the field. A primary area of investigation involved respondents' opinions on how the main ethnic groups in Sri Lanka, along with their respective religions, are portrayed within the local secondary school history curriculum. Participants were asked how the groups were portrayed in school history lessons, in terms of how much was taught about the history of each group and whether similar or contrasting images of different groups were transmitted. The answers received to this question from each of the four respondent groups mentioned above are discussed in this section.

#### *Youth*

In order to get a better idea of the pattern of responses received from youth of different ethnicities and religions, the data from each district is separately discussed below. Given that the question regarding the portrayal of ethnic groups was open ended and the participants were free to offer as many answers as they pleased, a variety of responses, exceeding the number of respondents interviewed in each district, were received. Broadly clustered under the two themes relating to quantity and image, 14 codes were assigned according to the popular responses that came out through the interviews. To facilitate a tabular presentation of the data, each code will be denoted by a letter of the English alphabet as follows.

- A – More focus on Sinhalese Buddhist history
- B – Inequality of information is justified
- C – Less focus on minority history
- D – Less focus on Tamil history
- E – Less focus on Muslim history
- F – Depiction of minorities as outsiders
- G – Positive versus negative images of ethnic groups
- H – Superior versus inferior images of ethnic groups
- I – Insufficient information on all groups
- J – Insufficient information on minorities only

K – Sufficient information on all groups

L – Equal representation of all ethnic groups

M – Common representation of ethnic groups

N – Translation issues

**Table 12: Responses of youth from the Matara district**

Respondent	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
Aven	1	1	1			1				1				
Pasangi	1	1	1							1				
Madara	1				1					1				
Piyali	1		1			1								
Vindya	1										1			
Hasanthi												1		
Hiranya	1	1												
Chamika	1		1											
Nalindrini												1		
Damayanathi	1	1	1											
Vishwa											1	1		
Inoshini	1													
Imanthi													1	
Akvan	1													
Vilakshi	1		1											
Maheshi	1									1				
Akushla	1									1				
Ruin	1	1									1			
Thamindu											1			
Kaya					1									
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>

A majority of youth from Matara, 70 percent to be precise, thought that the history they learned in school was mainly that of the Sinhalese ethnic group. Many of their responses resembled that of Hiranya, a 20 year old Sinhalese-Buddhist female, who said, “...there is more about the Sinhalese... mostly what is said is about the Sinhalese.” The answers of a few respondents were more nuanced. According to Inoshini, an 18 year old Sinhalese-Buddhist female, for instance, “the Sinhala nation have a special place in the books.”

From the 14 youth who declared that Sinhalese history dominated the curriculum, five participants believed that this proportionate difference in historical information was justified

given that the Sinhalese population were the majority. Yet, there was a slight variation in one of their paths of reasoning.

So, in the history lesson there is an equal place... Sinhala... when teaching about Sri Lankan history we catch less of the history of those ethnic groups right. So, the first ethnic group in Sri Lanka is the Sinhalese. So mostly what is spoken of are the things that spread across 2500 years of their history.

(Aven, 19 year old Sinhalese-Buddhist male)

Although at first this response is confusing since it starts off talking about equality and then notes that there is less information about other groups, its underlying premise reveals itself thereafter. In Aven's opinion, because the Sinhalese were Sri Lanka's first ethnic group, he believes that the story of the Sinhalese nation is what unfolds in the syllabus, with the other groups making only brief appearances. In other words, he equates Sri Lankan history taught in school to Sinhalese history. Another youth who brought up the majority argument did so only to explain, but not to justify, the proportionate difference in historical information about the ethnic groups. She claimed that the reason why the curriculum contains less about the history of Tamils and Muslims is because they are treated as minorities. Both these participants mentioned that it would be better if they were taught more about those other groups. While Aven based this suggestion on the fact that Sri Lanka is a multicultural country, Pasangi, the other respondent, expressed her views in the following manner.

...those other ethnic groups also should have the Sinhala right... Sri Lankan right. I'm saying not only for the Sinhalese, for other ethnic groups also... that means it's good if it was divided equally... if it was explained equally.

(Pasangi, 19 year old Sinhalese-Buddhist female)

However, out of the six participants who mentioned that the history of the minorities is paid less attention in the curriculum, Aven and Pasangi are the only youth who found that to be problematic. The others merely noted the disparity without offering any further opinion about it. It is also interesting to note that although one respondent specified that Muslim history in particular is paid less attention, no respondents made a similar observation regarding Tamil history. Considering the entire sample, five youth from Matara advocated the equal representation of the history of all ethnic groups, while six others either claimed that there

already is an equal representation or held that the amount of information that is presented about each ethnic group is sufficient. Seeing no ethnic disparities whatsoever, one participant named Imanthi, a 19 year old Sinhalese-Buddhist female, maintained that when teaching the history of the country, “they have taken the whole population in common.”

Two respondents offered an opinion of the image that is depicted of the various ethnic groups through the history curriculum. One of them noted that the syllabus does not contain any information regarding the permanent residence of minorities, implying that they are depicted as outsiders. He went on to add that although Tamils are introduced in history lessons through invasions, Tamils and Muslims are later shown to have cooperated in Sri Lanka’s effort to gain independence from the British. The alleged portrayal of Tamils as invaders seemed to have resonated with the other respondent who had the following to say about Tamils.

Hmm... anyway they look to come from India to gain power over someone here and spread their governance, right? So, the Tamil population also... most of them... I’m not saying 100 percent... most of them are the invading type.

(Piyali, 19 year old Sinhalese-Buddhist female)

The fact that this respondent uses the present tense in her answer implies that this is her current view of Tamils. This type of response shows the considerable impact that history education could have on shaping the mindsets of youth and reinforcing stereotypes.

**Table 13: Responses of youth from the Mullaitivu district**

Respondent	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
Kamilia	1			1			1							1
Kaushiyaani	1			1										
Niranjana	1			1						1				
Praveena	1		1											
Sanjana	1		1											
Anita	1		1											
Aranya	1			1				1						
Maithree	1			1										
Lathika	1			1						1				
Govinda	1		1				1							
Sathish	1													
Safia												1		
Thushi												1		
Mishka	1		1											
Danesh	1			1										
Lokesh	1			1										
Arvindi	1		1											
Geetha	1		1											
Diyan	1			1										1
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>

The Mullaitivu cohort were almost unanimous in their assertion that the local history curriculum gives prominence to Sinhalese history, with 89 percent supporting the claim. Among them seven youth mentioned that the history of the minorities is covered much less compared to that of the Sinhalese, some noting that Muslim history in particular was practically non-existent within the syllabus. The response of Anita given below is a good example.

So, most of the history books... so all say about the Sinhalese stories and also very little of Tamil, and almost there are no Muslim stories in anything [sic].

(Anita, 19 year old Tamil-Hindu female)

Nine others on the other hand focused solely on the shortage of Tamil history. Many of them specifically noted the disparity in the representation of the history of Sinhala kings and Tamil kings. Lokesh, one of the handful of youth who did not rely on school to gain historical knowledge, gave specific examples of Tamil kings who had been omitted from the curriculum. As he explained,

... Pandara Vanniyan<sup>62</sup>... and also Ravanana... and King Sangiliyan<sup>63</sup>... he ruled Jaffna last. So, these stories are not in the history books. But there are stories of a Sinhala king who ruled even one day, two days... those stories are in the history books.

(Lokesh, 24 year old Tamil-Hindu male)

Unlike the responses received from the purely Sinhalese cohort from Matara regarding the lack of Tamil stories in history lessons, the responses of these Tamil youth from Mullaitivu contained some animosity or bitterness. A few participants included image issues into their answers regarding the insufficiency of Tamil history, as shown from the following example.

...in history books there are lot of things about Sinhala history but there is almost nothing about Tamil history... and also... the history books say about... good things about Sinhala reign and also even the few Tamil stories tell about some bad things they have done to the people. So... only 10 percent of the book is Tamil history.

(Govinda, 21 year old Tamil-Hindu male)

This assertion that Sinhalese are portrayed in a positive light and Tamils are portrayed in a negative light was also made by another respondent. Meanwhile, a youth named Aranya felt that the Sinhalese were depicted as being superior to the Tamils.

... there is a little amount of stories about Tamil people and they have given an idea to the students like they are in the low caste or like low people when compared to the Sinhala community [sic].

(Aranya, 19 year old Tamil-Hindu female)

According to a pair of youth these problems relating to the portrayal of ethnic groups in the history curriculum is compounded by translation issues. Since the history books are written in Sinhala with names being changed accordingly, these participants expressed their uncertainty about the true ethnicity of the historical figures denoted by those names. Diyan for instance, a 21 year old Tamil-Christian male, stated that this creates confusion because they do not know “which is a Tamil story and which is a Sinhalese story.” Kamilia took this assertion further, claiming that certain names of people in the lessons have been selectively changed based on their moral characters and the merits and demerits of their actions. In her words,

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<sup>62</sup> See Glossary.

<sup>63</sup> See Glossary.

... they have done this to a few people... those who have done like good things to the people... like for the Tamil people... like Ravana<sup>64</sup>... he has done something good. So, those people, they have changed them as Sinhala people in the history. But the people like King Ellalan<sup>65</sup>... so he killed Dutugemunu<sup>66</sup>... so just because of that they are telling that he's a Tamil... so he has no connection with the Sinhalese. So, for the people... those who have built ponds and you know built viharas and everything... so they are telling that these people, even if they are Tamil, they have portrayed it [sic] as Sinhalese.

(Kamilia, 20 year old Tamil-Hindu female)

Finally, it is interesting to note that the only two youth from Mullaitivu who did not agree that Sinhalese were given more prominence in the history curriculum, were Muslims. Not only did they disagree with this point, they also stated that all the ethnic groups were equally represented within history lessons. By doing so, these Muslims participants followed the trend that was visible among the Muslims in the Ampara district of brushing over ethnic matters. This raises interesting identity related questions about Muslim youth and their apparent tolerance or denial of ethnic differences.

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<sup>64</sup> See Glossary.

<sup>65</sup> Ellalan is the Tamil name of King Elara. The textbooks of all languages however refer to him as Elara, which is the Sinhalese translation of his name.

<sup>66</sup> This assertion is not factual since according to multiple historical sources, it is King Dutugemunu who is said to have killed King Elara.



**Table 14: Responses of youth from the Ampara district**

Respondent	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
Zaiqath	1									1				
Imran												1		
Fazry	1	1												
Thalal	1	1									1			
Shafraz									1					
Suranjan									1					
Divakar												1		
Shoib											1	1		
Shubham												1		
Adnaan										1				
Arun												1		
Azmah											1	1		
Hafeel	1													
Mustafa	1	1												
Awnee												1		
Rizah	1		1											
Murad	1									1				
Saad												1		
Inshad	1									1				
Siraj	1	1												
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

Only 45 percent of participants from Ampara stated that the history curriculum focused mainly on Sinhalese history. The same ratio exceeded 50 percent in all the other districts. Out of the nine youth in Ampara who made this claim, four youth justified it by saying that Muslims and Tamils are minorities and thereby have shorter histories than the Sinhalese majority. By stressing that history lessons have “just described the truth”, these participants implied that school history textbooks give a true depiction of the varying historical durations of each ethnic group. In explaining the difference between Sinhalese and Muslims, Thalal attempted to shed some further light on this argument as shown below.

They (referring to the Sinhalese) have ruled Sri Lanka much longer and that's the reason they have mentioned in the books... they have mentioned deeply [sic]. But Muslims they have no history no... there is a little history... and there is no ruler for Muslims... but Sinhala people there are... there were many rulers... that's the difference between those two.

(Thalal, 21 year old Muslim male)

It is interesting how being a Muslim himself, this respondent initially says that Muslims have no history. While it is likely that he meant that Muslims came to Sri Lanka much later than the Sinhalese, it does not mean that they do not have a rich history both in and out of the island. It is also worth noting that he and his colleagues either grouped Tamils with Muslims as also having a brief history, or they left Tamils out of their answer completely, even though the history of Tamils in Sri Lanka is believed to be similar in duration to that of the Sinhalese. In fact, Thalal and two other respondents also expressed that in their opinion the amount of history that they learn about each group is sufficient.

The insufficiency regarding what is taught about the minorities however, was brought up by four youth. One of them focused his answer on religions, claiming that Buddhism receives too much attention compared to the other religions. According to Adnaan, another youth, what is taught about the history of minorities is only enough to answer examination papers and is not sufficient for youth of their age. Two others took this argument one step further, claiming that let alone minorities, a deeper exploration of the history of all groups would be welcome.

The most surprising finding that came out from the Ampara group was that eight out the 20 youth interviewed expressed that in their opinion the history curriculum contained an equal representation of the history of each ethnic group. The reason why this is strange is that an objective reading of the secondary school history textbooks invalidates this assertion, a fact that was acknowledged even by many Sinhalese youth in the other districts. The question regarding the portrayal of ethnic groups, which in itself was quite lengthy and clearly explained, received several brief and dismissive answers such as that of Shoib, a 22 year old Muslim male, who simply said, "Equally described."

Through these curt replies some youth displayed a clear reluctance to discuss such a question. Certain others like Shubham, a 22 year old Muslim male, offered objectively false answers. According to him, "Generally, they have mentioned... as Muslims they have mentioned a lot."

This trend of going to the extent of bending the truth, just to give the impression that there are no ethnic disparities, was common among this purely Muslim group of youth.

**Table 15: Responses of youth from the Colombo district**

Respondent	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
Shamali						1	1			1				
Wasanthi								1		1				
Imesh	1		1											
Shehani	1		1				1							
Dinesha	1		1							1				
Thamesha										1				
Prashan	1					1		1						
Charith	1		1											
Gayani	1													
Ishantha											1			
Dinusha	1			1						1				
Nayomi										1				
Anika											1			
Hashintha													1	
Hansanie							1				1			
Pooja	1									1				
Yasuntha	1		1											
Ayudya	1	1												
Shivangi					1								1	
Neera	1				1	1								
Safran	1	1												
Aaminah							1							
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>

Although just over half of the Colombo group, or 55 percent, explicitly stated that the history curriculum contains more information about Sinhalese history, several others implied this through their responses which dealt with other issues relating to bias. Some youth like Charith, a 20 year old Sinhalese-Buddhist male, impassively noted the dominance of Sinhalese history without offering an opinion on it, as evident from his comment, “It seems in school we learn only Sinhala history.” Certain others however, expressed frustration about this apparent disparity in the historical representation of ethnicities. Yasuntha, a Sinhalese youth, for instance stated,

We don't have any idea about Muslims no... and also Tamil [sic]... we have only a general idea. But we know our Sinhala history really well because of the books and they highly specialize the point and they break it down [sic]. So, I think it's not too much fair [sic] because of the others... Sinhala is ok... we can learn our past very clearly. But when we consider about [sic] the other Tamil and Muslim students it's a little bit unfair.

(Yasuntha, 22 year old Sinhalese-Buddhist female)

Two participants did not see this as a matter of injustice. They simply believed that the difference in the portrayal of the history of the Sinhalese in relation to the Tamils and Muslims was representative of the proportionate difference of the majority and minority populations in the country. From those who did not attempt to justify the disparity, most explained that compared to the Sinhalese, only a little is taught about Tamils and even less about Muslims.

Apart from how much is taught about each ethnic group, several Colombo youth spoke about the way different groups are depicted in the history curriculum. It is worth looking closely at some of their responses as they reveal certain shades of meaning that youth derive from school history lessons. Starting with the response of Neera, a Tamil participant, it is evident that there is a tendency of portraying the minorities as outsiders.

So, I feel like there is an imbalance in the amount of information given, uh maybe because that's the way our history is... I don't know. But I feel like there is a lot of concentration on the kings in the kingdoms like in the early times... I feel like they were considered the Sinhalese and I feel like Tamil people were mostly not considered a part of the country but rather as South Indian people who had come as an external party... external people. Like they were never really considered as... even the Jaffna kingdom was like mostly associated with the Indians. And the Muslims also... I feel they were never really mentioned in the early history.

(Neera, 20 year old Tamil-Hindu female)

Neera's 'outsider' argument was echoed by a Sinhalese respondent in relation to Muslims. Tamils in her opinion, were depicted as opposing forces in history lessons.

Like they taught us we had wars with Tamils like Dutugemunu and Elara and like they were very bad. Then for Muslims like... they came to our country and they settled in, but they don't belong to this country.

(Shamali, 23 year old Sinhalese-Buddhist female)

This tendency to transmit a negative image of Tamils was brought up by four youth including Shamali. There was another interesting element to one of their responses, which is mentioned below.

Elara was portrayed in a negative light. Generally, all Indians were portrayed in a negative light.

(Aaminah, 20 year old Muslim female)

Who this respondent was referring to as 'all Indians' in this context, were Tamil people. The fact that Aaminah, a Muslim participant, referred to Tamils as Indians is strange since by that logic the Sinhalese too are believed to be descendent from Indians who landed in Sri Lanka. This begs the question as to whether Aaminah too views Tamils as outsiders and Sinhalese as the true Sri Lankans.

Another Sinhalese respondent mentioned that she does not think that Tamils are actually depicted in a negative light, but rather that they falsely claim to be portrayed negatively. It is worth noting that this participant complained throughout the interview that minority claims of ill-treatment and the like were unsubstantiated and she denied the existence of an ethnic problem in the country.

Joining the image discussion, Prashan, a Sinhalese participant, combined the two points raised above and added a third theme of Sinhalese superiority to his response, as follows.

I think the way that the curriculum has been set... they portray the Sinhalese as the supreme race and the others just joining in [sic]. I think the Muslims have been just identified as trade groups but the Tamils as sort of rivals for power or something.

(Prashan, 19 year old Sinhalese-Buddhist male)

Being a Sinhalese herself, Wasanthi agreed with the assertion that the Sinhalese are shown as the superior race. Along with six other participants she stressed that the history education they

received about the minorities was insufficient. Using the Tamil ethnic group as an example she said,

They just tell there's a famous kovil in Jaffna and King Dutugemunu fought with King Elara... so that's not enough. We never knew that they had a rich culture.

(Wasanthi, 22 year old Sinhalese-Christian female)

An impassioned case in favour of this argument was made by another Sinhalese participant, Shamali, who held that no matter what ethnicity a child is born into in Sri Lanka, they still belong to this country and should thereby get the opportunity to learn about their people.

Three youth in this group however, maintained that the history of all groups transmitted in the curriculum is sufficient. One of them reasoned that everything that is taught about all ethnicities and religions was positive and it was enough to get a rough idea about each. This answer could be seen as problematic on two fronts. Firstly, the fact that only positive aspects of all groups are discussed implies that contentious and difficult matters are omitted and a selective history is presented. Secondly, it is questionable whether it is suitable to give youth only a 'rough idea' or in other words a superficial understanding of the history of the country.

Another argument that came out from two members of the Colombo cohort was that the history taught in school, particularly ancient history, did not specifically mention different ethnic groups. One of them said that it was only after Buddhism was first adopted by King Devanampiyatissa that the religious backgrounds of kings were discussed. The other participant held that Sri Lankan history is all about Indians and thereby refrained from commenting on any ethnic differences. In the absence of any elaboration, the latter response was rather baffling.

#### General observations on youth respondents

The opinion that the local history curriculum is largely focussed on Sinhalese history compared to that of the minorities was shared by 64 percent of the total sample of youth. The conflicting opinion that the history of all ethnic groups is equally represented in the curriculum however, was expressed by only 16 percent of the same group.

**Table 16: Responses of youth from all four districts**

	<b>Matara</b>	<b>Mullaitivu</b>	<b>Ampara</b>	<b>Colombo</b>	<b>Total</b>
Contains more Sinhala Buddhist history	14	17	9	12	52 (64%)
History of all groups is equally represented	3	2	8	0	13 (16%)

Out of the 13 youth who made the later assertion, eight of them were from the Ampara district. Thus, the Muslim cohort in Ampara stood out from the rest in terms of the number of youth who maintained the objectively falsifiable claim that the history curriculum contained an equal representation of the history of all ethnic groups in the country. The Colombo sample occupied the other end of the spectrum with the equal representation claim not being made by anyone. They were closely joined by the Mullaitivu group where only two youth, both of whom were Muslim, made this assertion. Even the purely Sinhalese Matara cohort fell on the lower end of spectrum with only three participants voicing this claim.

Certain other interesting findings came out of the Ampara district. For instance, only one participant explicitly stated that minority history is paid less attention in the curriculum and no participants made any specific comments about the lack of Muslim history. This stood in stark contrast to the other districts where many respondents noted that while Tamil history is relatively less than Sinhalese history, the syllabus contains hardly anything about the Muslims. Also, no comments emerged from the Ampara district regarding the images that are transmitted through history lessons of the different ethnic groups. Placing the Ampara interviews within a broader ethnic context, it is possible to come up with a few suggestions to explain the unusual observations made with regard to these Muslim participants. Firstly, the dismissive and uninterested responses provided by Muslim minority youth in the North and East could be a result of their reluctance to discuss ethnic matters. Secondly, based on their answers to this question as well as their general attitudes displayed during the interviews, it can be suggested that Muslim youth may be in denial about some of the discrimination that they could be facing. Whether due to reluctance or denial, Muslim youth may prefer to sweep ethnic issues under the rug so that they can keep their heads down and live quietly in the multicultural Sri Lankan society. This preference could stem from intrinsic characteristics or it could be a reaction to the ethnic pressures which have been re-directed toward the Muslim minority by some members of the Sinhalese majority in the period following the end of the Sinhalese-Tamil ethnic war.

The main findings that came out of the other minority district, Mullaitivu, while not surprising, were no less striking. Mullaitivu had the highest ratio of those who stated that Sinhalese history dominated the curriculum and there was an underlying sense of animosity in the responses of many Tamil youth. This quality was mostly absent in the answers of the respondents from other districts who shared similar opinions about Sinhalese bias. Furthermore, unlike the other districts where at least two or three youth justified the unequal representation of the history of ethnic groups based on the proportionate sizes of the majority and minorities, no one from Mullaitivu offered this type of reasoning.

As with certain other themes, the views of the ethnically mixed group of respondents from Colombo mostly resembled those of the Tamil minority from Mullaitivu. Interestingly, the highest number of opinions regarding the transmission of contrasting images of ethnic groups through the history curriculum emerged from the Colombo cohort, most of whom were a part of the majority.

#### *History teachers*

Out of the total sample of 12 teachers nine of them, or 83 percent, shared the view that the history curriculum focusses more on Sinhalese history compared to that of the minorities. As one of them, Mr. Jagath, a Sinhalese-Buddhist teacher from Matara, simply put it, “It’s like this... mostly what is in the history curriculum is about the Sinhala ethnic group.” A Tamil teacher from Mullaitivu expressed stronger feelings on the subject, saying,

... history books shouldn’t show favouritism... like they have to equally balance the stories and the amount of things they... show in the history books.

(Mr.Lokesh, a Tamil-Hindu teacher)

Mr. Lokesh went on to explain the impact this imbalance has on student identities, stating that Tamil students often question the absence of Tamil history. In his words,

... they have this thinking that... where are our kings’ names and where are the stories of our kings that are not... stated in the history books... so what happened to those?

Adding to this point, Miss Sadana from Ampara noted that students also question how Tamils came to the country since it is not clearly explained in the syllabus. She further mentioned that



upon hearing that Tamils came from India, students then ask who the Sinhalese are and whether they too aren't Tamils themselves. By explaining such queries of students, she showed the confusion that is created in the minds of certain youth regarding their ethnic identity. She concluded that the information contained in the curriculum is insufficient for students to gain a good understanding of the history and origins of the Tamil and Muslim ethnic groups, asserting that,

In history those two are less. Tamil and Muslim history are less. It's good for the children if that is included.

(Miss. Sadana, a Tamil-Hindu teacher)

Apart from the insufficiency of minority history, only one teacher from Matara mentioned anything regarding the images of the different groups. Explaining that because the *Mahavamsa* is used as a main source when writing the history curriculum, he stated that,

Tamils are depicted as those who came to ruin the country... So, this promotes angry feelings among the students.

(Mr. Bathiya, a Sinhalese-Buddhist teacher)

With respect to Sinhalese students however, he explained that positive sentiments are fostered through the curriculum, saying that,

...you get a feeling about your own ethnic group... about your country... our kings have done this... they have saved our country... that kind of feeling arises.

Only one Muslim teacher from Ampara held that the curriculum contains an equal representation of the history of all groups and that the information provided about each group is sufficient. Another Sinhala-Buddhist teacher from Matara maintained that the history curriculum "is written in a way that respects cultures."

However, Miss Lucia, a Tamil-Hindu teacher from Mullaitivu, stated that sometimes the history textbooks place blame for certain problems on Muslims and Tamils. Having Muslim and Tamil students in their classrooms, she held that this puts the teachers in a difficult position. Yet, instead of explicitly saying "Muslims did this" or "Tamils did this", she stated that she explains to students that certain mistakes were made in the past by our ancestors and so we

need to learn lessons from those mistakes and make sure not to repeat them in the future. In her view, an explanation of that manner avoids the promotion of racism and discrimination. Another teacher from Mullaitivu agreed with this concern that Muslims in particular are often blamed in the curriculum for creating problems. She too had a diplomatic approach of dealing with this, by spreading the responsibility among larger groups instead of pinpointing individuals to take the fall. A Sinhalese-Buddhist teacher from Matara too held that she sometimes struggles when teaching Muslim students, particularly with respect to lessons that deal with their religion.

### *History content creators*

Three of the four Sinhala members of the content development teams asserted that the history curriculum contained a balanced representation of the history of all ethnic groups. Denying the need to even differentiate between the groups, one of them said,

Now my view is that there is nothing called Sinhala history, Tamil history, Muslim history. There is only Sri Lankan history. That Sri Lankan history is taught.

(Mr. Ariyaratne, a Sinhalese-Buddhist history content creator)

The other two members provided examples to prove that minority history is included in the curriculum. According to Prof. Ediriweera the grade 7 book contains information regarding the spread of Hinduism during the Polonnaruwa era. Ms. Dissanayaka agreed that it is taught how Hinduism spread when the Chola influence came to Sri Lanka in the 7th and 8th centuries and she maintained that the same book has a lesson on religious revivals which separately looks at the Hindu revival and Islamic revival alongside the Buddhist revival. She also held that when it comes to modern history, Christianity and Protestantism are discussed together with the other social aspects such as names, food, laws etc. which received the European influence. While these assertions may be true, they do not reveal the proportionate difference in the amount of information that is given about different religions throughout the curriculum. Besides, in the case of Christianity, since it is portrayed as pervasive force, most of the information given about it in the curriculum is negative.

The infamous King Elara example was also presented by Ms. Dissanayaka as proof of the presence of Tamil history. Throughout the interviews this seemed to be the ‘go to’ example for those who argued that the curriculum contained a sufficient amount of Tamil history.

Now actually what we have is a Sinhalese-Buddhist civilization no from the Anuradhapura era, but even there we do not talk about it in a hard way. Now we explain well about Elara. But there isn’t anything about Elara in a lot of sources. But we give information about it however we can.

(Ms. Dissanayaka Sinhalese-Buddhist history content creator)

Some of other academics however, held that the high dependence on the *Mahavamsa* as a source when writing the textbooks was the reason for the insufficiency of minority history. Referring to the inclusion of Tamil and Muslim history in the curriculum by the development team, a Tamil member of the group, Ms. Deandra, stated, “They try to do that. Sometimes it is not happening.” Along with Ms. Deandra another Muslim member of the group, maintained that currently the amount of minority history that is taught is insufficient.

That is not enough. Generally, it’s just lightly mentioned in a place or two. That is not enough.

(Mr. Mohamed, a Muslim history content creator)

He held that it is generally known that it is a Sinhala-Buddhist history that students must learn in school. Even a Sinhala-Buddhist member of the team, Mr. Kularatne, agreed with this point, saying, “Now to a large extent what we have to do is the Sinhala-Buddhist culture, no?” Discussing the overall effectiveness of history education, Mr. Mohamed added that there was a difference in its impact on Sinhalese and Tamils. As he explained,

That is, effectiveness... generally from the Sinhala medium side that is right [sic]. What I can say is that the effectiveness for the Tamil medium is about 50 percent.

He elaborated that although history teaching does indeed have an impact on identity formation,

Generally, compared to how it impacts a Sinhala student, there is not enough information there for a Tamil or Muslim student to build up that identity.

He considered this to be a problem, seeing as how Tamil and Muslim children who learn the current history curriculum wonder where their history is. Mr. Mohamed went on to explain that the problem is compounded by language issues which are indicative of a wider problem of bias. Referring to the Tamil population in the Northern and Eastern areas of the country, he said,

They felt that generally even the history textbook is written by suppressing their history. In the Mahavamsa, now that King Pandukhabaya's son's name comes as Muthrasivan no... Muthrasiva<sup>67</sup> or sivan. That Muthrasiva's name... Muthra is a good Tamil word. They (the textbook writers) write that from the Mahavamsa as Mudasiva or Muttasiva. So then from there itself they (Tamil people) think... "now look...Muthrasiva is a good Tamil name. It must have been given to him in that time... there was no Buddhism in that time no... he's King Davanampiyatissa's (the Sri Lankan king who first adopted Buddhism) father no. So, there they are misrepresenting even our names... they are suppressing them"... a thought like that was generally there among the Tamil population in the North and East.

He further mentioned that even when it comes to examinations Tamil students face issues since the translations of the papers are never 100 percent accurate. Certain names or terms are not translated into Tamil properly, which makes Tamil students unable to understand and answer some questions correctly. Ms. Dissanayaka too agreed with this point, stating,

Earlier also it was said that in some Tamil books what is said in Sinhala is not what... it is not that meaning which comes out. Those are the errors made when doing their translations.

(Ms. Dissanayaka, a Sinhalese-Buddhist history content creator)

Prof. Ediriweera however, maintained that although the English translations are usually filled with errors, the Tamil translations tend to be accurate since there are Tamil speaking members in the curriculum development team. Yet, being one of those Tamil speakers, Mr. Mohamed admitted that his involvement in writing content was minimal. Referring to the Sinhala members of the team, he stated, "They write it and give, all we do it translate." Moreover, Mr. Mohamed explained that due to heavy reliance on the *Mahavamsa* as a source, certain names

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<sup>67</sup> See Glossary.

etc. are written incorrectly even in the original Sinhala version of the textbooks, and the same errors are carried forth into the Tamil translations. Believing that it would address many of the aforementioned issues, he welcomed the suggestion of making an ethnic consideration when selecting the curriculum development and textbook writing teams or in other words including Tamils and Muslims in developing content.

#### *Other academics*

The most common point that came out through the interviews with academics was that ethnic prejudice should be avoided at all costs in the history curriculum. Prof. Siriweera for instance stated that,

So, rewriting history, focusing on a balanced integration, is absolutely necessary. A balanced representation of facts should be there in school textbooks. And by taking religion, not only Buddhism... Hinduism, Islam, Christianity; they must all be focused on for people, for students, to develop a liberal mind. So, there is a big task ahead for the NIE or curriculum planners.

(Prof. Siriweera, a Sinhalese-Buddhist academic)

Believing that this task has not been adequately performed, Dr. Wijesinghe held that the curriculum lacks a clear vision of promoting social harmony. Taking the much discussed example of King Elara and King Dutugemunu, she explained that in the source which was used to write it, the *Mahavamsa*, 33 chapters have been devoted to the heroism of King Dutugemunu, the 'saviour of the nation', while the fact that King Elara was able to peacefully rule Anuradhapura for 44 years without any revolt is not recognised as an achievement. She maintained that the story receives a similar treatment in the textbooks, thereby making them imbalanced. Prof. Jayaweera too held that the textbooks are not written in a multi-ethnic angle, stating,

It has been more or less Sinhala history. Actually, I do not think some books have anything but Sinhala history.

(Prof. Jayaweera, a Sinhalese-Buddhist academic)

Citing Sinhalese bias as the reason, Prof. Jayaweera and most of the other academics held that although history education could have an impact on reconciliation, it does not do so the way it is currently taught in Sri Lanka.

## 5.2. Reactions to culturally sensitive material

This section analyses participant reactions to a question regarding a stone inscription made by a past Sri Lankan king, which states, “Like attempting to plant poisonous trees in a place where there had been wish conferring trees earlier (like kapruka), non-Buddhists should not be placed in power in Sri Lanka to which the Kalinga dynasty was the rightful heir” (Educational Publications Department, 2007a, p. 104). King Nissankamalla who was the writer of this inscription, was a member of the Kalinga dynasty, which had established itself in Sri Lanka through marriage ties. His dedication to the promotion of Buddhism was considered to be a tactic of stabilizing the power of his dynasty and establishing its right to the royal throne. Although this backstory is briefly explained in the textbook, his declaration that only a Buddhist is worthy of the throne is referred to as one of the main services rendered by him for the betterment of the nation. Nevertheless, this background information which is contained in the history curriculum, was not given to the respondents when they were asked about their opinion on the content of the stone inscription. The aim of the question was to understand participant reactions to a contentious statement such as this, in terms of their level of agreement or disagreement with it and their ability to use historical knowledge as well as reasoning and critical thinking skills to support their stance. While this was also expected to shed some light on the maturity, or the lack thereof, of youth in handling ethnically sensitive material, history teachers were questioned on their methods of dealing with this type of material in the classroom.

### *Youth*

Out of the 81 youth involved in the study, 70 respondents offered up an opinion on whether they agree or disagree with the message contained in the inscription. A striking 84 percent of that group disagreed with the sentiment expressed and found it to be racist, while the remaining 16 percent agreed with the idea and viewed it as an acceptable or appropriate declaration. The general level of background knowledge about the said inscription and the king who made it however, was extremely low.

The response pattern of the Ampara contingent is a case in point. Not one individual knew the background of King Nissankamalla and his desire to garner the support of the Buddhists, but 18 out of the 19 youth who offered an opinion on the statement, expressed anger over it. The response of a youth named Adnaan for instance was conveyed by the translator as follows.

He could not agree with that statement because there are four religions, four cultures in Sri Lanka and they have mentioned only one culture here. They could not mention that that is a poisonous one like that [sic]... the Sinhala people can't mention that other religions are poisonous like that... there are four cultures no... there is no right for mentioning that [sic].

(Adnaan, 21 year old Muslim male)

Several respondents drew comparisons to current politics from this example. Shedding light on what he believed was a flaw of democracy, a Muslim youth named Thalal explained that even today the voting behavior of citizens was largely dependent on their ethnicity. According to him people in the purely Muslim village of Kalmunai would only vote for Muslim leaders rather than Sinhalese or Tamils, just as people in Sinhalese areas would not vote for anyone but a Sinhalese. While Thalal advocated the need to change the mindsets of Sri Lankans, his Tamil friend Divakar stressed the need to fight racism in Sri Lanka, noting that irrespective of ethnicity the president of the country should be a good role model.

In the Matara district, 13 out of 19 respondents who voiced their opinion, disagreed with the statement. The frustration felt by some of them was visible in answers such as that of Akvan, a 19 year old Sinhalese-Buddhist youth, who said, "That is really unfair. Just like us the other ethnic groups should also have the same rights." Certain others expressed their disagreement in more positive terms. Referring to the king of the country, Akushla for instance stated,

He doesn't have to be a Buddhist itself. If we let go of religions and castes etc. and we all think of ourselves as Sri Lankans, then whatever ethnic group the king of the country is from, the development of the country will remain the same.

(Akushla, 20 year old Sinhalese-Buddhist female)

The responses of two youth who believed that irrespective of ethnicity anyone should be able to rule the country, contained a caveat that required the ruler to protect and promote Buddhism. Using King Elara as an example, one of them explained their position as follows.

Elara was also a Tamil ruler but he did things for the Buddhist religion... he was a leader who did that... because of that he had an impact. If they can do something special on behalf of the Sinhala nation (i.e. ethnic group), the religion, it's ok if someone from a different religion rules the country.

(Ruvini, 20 year old Sinhalese-Buddhist male)

The level of agreement regarding the statement concerned was low among the Mullaitivu cohort as well, with all 14 youth who offered a clear opinion on the statement, disagreeing with it. A notable point here is that words such as 'racism', 'discrimination' and 'dominance' made far more appearances in the responses of this group compared to the others. Some youth like Diyan, a 21 year old Tamil-Christian male, simply expressed sentiments like, "I think that's a racist quote." Others, meanwhile, tried to elaborate on why they believed the statement was wrong. The explanation provided by Niranjana for example, was conveyed by the translator in the following manner.

He says that we can't say that a non-Buddhist can't rule the country... like the Buddhist... so everyone is equal, so it doesn't come with the religion or with the nationality or ethnicity [sic]. So, we can't discriminate people by their religion or nationality. So, he thinks that that is wrong because it creates discrimination and promotes racism.

(Niranjana, 22 year old Tamil-Hindu male)

Like the other districts, the opposition towards the statement outweighed the support among the Colombo contingent, with 14 out of 18 who offered an opinion, voicing their disagreement. Many of them argued their case in a controlled and reasonable manner as evident from the examples below.

If the person has the patriotism and capability to rule the country, I don't think that one's race should be a hindrance to being the ruler. Ironically there are rulers who are racially legit to become rulers, who have done more harm to the nation.

(Aminah, 20 year old Muslim female)



I think it's not that correct because all are in one nation, we can't tell that only Buddhists can sit on the throne... not others [sic]. I think it can be also a reason for these conflicts between all the ethnic groups, even in present.

(Dinesha, 19 year old Sinhalese-Buddhist female)

Certain respondents on the other hand, were angry about such subject matter being included in the school textbooks. The impassioned response of Wasanthi, 22 year old Sinhalese-Christian female, exemplifies this: "They teach small children to hate each other... and how can we give Tamils to read it?"

As previously mentioned, 16 percent of those who offered an opinion on the sentiment behind the inscription, agreed with it. Like those in the opposing camp, these youth too were not knowledgeable about the context within which the stone inscription was written, and thereby the answers given by them were purely spontaneous reactions to the controversial statement.

The highest number of answers that were in favour of the inscription were received from the Matara cohort. They were provided by 6 respondents who held that Buddhist leadership is what suited the country best. Explaining why she supports the statement, Vilakshi noted,

The way I think, I feel that is right. It is a Sinhala-Buddhist who should rule the country, otherwise Buddhism will be lost from the country.

(Vilakshi, 19 year old Sinhalese-Buddhist female)

Once again, the protection of Buddhism appeared to be a priority for many individuals in the Matara contingent. Providing a slightly more nuanced response, Madara stated that Lord Buddha was a great philosopher and preached the middle path. Thus, she held,

So, because of that I think if someone is definitely becoming the king of a country, that person should be a Buddhist. Then the country's good governance... everything in the country... socialism... everything will happen properly.

(Madara, 19 year old Sinhalese-Buddhist female)

Among the Colombo group, four participants emphatically agreed with the statement, with three of them basing their answers on the fact that Sri Lanka is a Buddhist country. Surprisingly, one of these individuals was not a Sinhalese herself, but a Burgher. A common preconception

that Sinhalese people have regarding Tamils was visible in the response of another youth named Charith, who stated that,

It's good because most of the people in Sri Lanka are Sinhala and Buddhist so I think they don't like a Tamil ruler. So, if they are a Tamil ruler [sic] they try to divide the country... like North side and the South [sic]. So, I think Sinhala and Buddhist leaders are suitable for Sri Lanka.

(Charith, 20 year old Sinhalese-Buddhist male)

The fourth youth from Colombo who agreed with the statement, had quite a baffling response. She questioned whether a Muslim leader wouldn't impose a law requiring all women, including Sinhalese-Buddhists, to wear a burka. She held that Sri Lanka was very different to other countries like India where leaders could not influence cultural values. Rather, she maintained,

In Sri Lanka we don't have any national policies, even for education, even for health. There are very subjective policies. It can be changed according to the rulers.

(Hansanie, 24 year old Sinhalese-Buddhist female)

While this argument is inaccurate on many levels, it would be interesting to uncover how a young person like herself arrived at such a conclusion.

With respect to the reactions of the Ampara cohort, one respondent called the inscription a fair statement, believing that the government should be in the hands of the majority. Not surprisingly, no one from the Mullaitivu group agreed with this controversial statement.

A few respondents made references to the background or context within which the stone inscription in question was written. However, many of them were misinformed, as evident from the factual errors contained in their responses. While one youth incorrectly held that Nissankamalla from the Kalinga dynasty was a Buddhist king, three others confused him with Kalinga Magha<sup>68</sup> who invaded Sri Lanka in 1215 AD and caused a lot of death and destruction. Only four youth from the total sample of 81, knew the correct background information that was relevant to the writing of this stone inscription. Two of them were from the Mullaitivu district and the other two were from the Colombo district.

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<sup>68</sup> See Glossary.

Whilst not being fully aware of the context surrounding the creation of this stone inscription, around 11 respondents provided mature responses by critically analysing the comment and offering suggestions as to why King Nissankamalla may have said it. The balanced viewpoint held by some of them came out through responses like that of a Tamil youth named Danesh from Mullaitivu who maintained that just like this king was biased towards the Sinhalese, a Tamil king would have made a similar claim in favour of the Tamils. Another respondent from Colombo named Pooja had difficulty in taking a stance on this issue since, as she said,

On one side it is unfair. And on the other side, when we think that Sri Lanka is the only Buddhist country in the world... so sometimes it may be fair. Generally, it's unfair. But others also should respect that.

(Pooja, 23 year old Sinhalese-Christian female)

The answer given by Shivangi too, was balanced and showed that correct assumptions can sometimes be derived by critical analysis and reasoning. In her words,

I think he wanted to sort of confine the throne to his dynasty, which is the Kalinga dynasty, and I think he must have given more prominence to his dynasty. I don't think he was even thinking about the Buddhists per se, I think he was more involved with his own dynasty.

(Shivangi, 20 year old Tamil-Hindu female from Colombo)

Taken together, these findings reveal that ethnically sensitive material does have a strong impact on students, as seen by the resistance displayed by a majority of youth towards racism and discrimination. While many youth demonstrated the capacity to handle such material in a mature fashion, it is fair to assume that many others may have been able to do so had they been better informed.

### *History teachers*

With respect to the stone inscription made by King Nissankamalla, four teachers stated that they simply explained to students that having a Sinhalese-Buddhist ruler was an ancient tradition in the country and the king was merely referring to it in his inscription. Revealing how she taught this lesson, Ms. Nalika for instance held,

...what I said was that in Sri Lanka the power of ruling... the fact that the national leader should be a Buddhist was said from the ancient past itself... beyond that the students were given no further information.

(Ms. Nalika, a Sinhalese-Buddhist teacher from Matara)

Making the same point, three teachers added that even now it needs to be accepted that a Sinhalese will rule the country since their ethnic group makes up the majority.

Now the fact that a Sinhalese-Buddhist has to be king is something that was there in Sri Lanka from the past itself, right? Therefore, since a majority of those who live in Sri Lanka are Sinhalese, we have to respect that, right?

(Mr. Jagath, a Sinhalese-Buddhist teacher from Matara)

Given that the majority will always elect a leader from their group, even Ms. Saakshi, a Tamil teacher from Mullaitivu, held that Tamil youth need to become resigned to the fact that the ruler of Sri Lanka will be a Sinhalese-Buddhist. In her words, “So, we can’t just go and compete with them... we can’t just say it’s wrong.” While her approach to dealing with a contentious subject is quite matter-of-fact or realistic, it could be questioned as to whether it isn’t somewhat disheartening for Tamil students to be told that they cannot compete politically with the majority.

Two teachers believed that this matter should be taught in a way that fosters cultural cooperation. Their approaches however, were drastically different. Mr. Imantha, a Sinhalese-Buddhist teacher from Matara, held that he would explain the subject in detail by portraying it as a dynasty story and analysing the character of the king, with the aim of showing the injustice in the statement. Ms. Sadana from Ampara on the other hand, maintained that it is not good to instil negative ideas in children regarding the morality or ethicality of the statement. As she explained,

...when reading it in the book, saying that it is a Sinhala king who has said it... that it’s said against other Tamil kings... that it is wrong... it’s not good for us to teach it like that. Why? Because we should create good citizens in our country. When creating them like that, it is not good for us to put bad opinions like this into the minds of little children. If it’s there in the book, without giving it too much importance, we should go

on teaching normally, in order to form good citizens for Sri Lanka. It's wrong to teach in a divisive way.

(Ms. Sadana, a Tamil-Hindu teacher)

Only two of the 12 teachers who were interviewed seemed to be aware of the background story behind the stone inscription. King Nissankamalla who was the writer of this inscription, was a member of the Kalinga dynasty, which had established itself in Sri Lanka through marriage ties. His dedication to the promotion of Buddhism was considered to be a tactic of stabilizing the power of his dynasty and establishing its right to the royal throne. As Mr. Bathiya explained,

So, it was in order to state that even those in the Kalinga dynasty have royal heritage that he wrote this inscription. So, the way to show children heritage, is through this... that even a Kalinga dynast has a royal family connection.

(Mr. Bathiya, a Sinhalese-Buddhist teacher from Matara)

Thus, by explaining the matter in this manner, he was able to show that although this statement made by King Nissankamalla seemed blatantly racist on the outset, there was a deeper reason behind it. This is a good way to explain it to students. However, the fact that most of the other teachers did not seem to possess a sufficient level of knowledge and understanding about the matter which would have enabled them to adopt this approach, is troubling.

### 5.3. Relevance of secondary literature

The primary data presented in this chapter attempted to answer some of the questions deemed important by Foster (1999, p. 251) with relation to history teaching, such as “whose history gets told?” and “how should the experiences of various ethnic groups be portrayed?”. While textbook analysis and the views of a majority of youth and teachers showed that the answer to the former question was mainly the history of the Sinhalese, three out of four of the Sinhalese-Buddhist content creators insisted that the history of all ethnic groups gets told. The latter question was answered by the academics interviewed in the study, who advocated a balanced representation of the history of all cultural groups in Sri Lanka.

Moving on to further findings of the textbook analysis, many of them appear to corroborate the arguments put forth by Gaul (2014) who carried out similar studies on Sri Lankan history textbooks. The propagation of the myth of descent is the perfect case in point. Just as Gaul

asserts, the textbooks cling to the highly contested Aryan myth, using it to stabilise Sinhalese claims of being the first settlers on the island. Tamils on the other hand are implicitly portrayed as South Indian invaders and the origins of Muslims are not discussed in the books at all. The primary position given to Buddhism within the curriculum is another point that not only affirms Gaul's claims, but also exemplifies Greaney's (2006) criteria of religious bias, which according to him is one of the ways that diversity is undermined in educational publications.

The findings related to the representation of minorities in textbooks and the opinions expressed by a majority of youth and teachers regarding the Sri Lankan history curriculum being largely focussed on the Sinhalese-Buddhist nation, bear considerable relevance to many of the ideas expressed in the literature. Lall's (2008) theory of national identity formation for instance, which follows a pattern of viewing the 'other' as inferior, applies to some of the comments made by respondents like Aranya from Mullaitivu who held that Tamils are portrayed as being 'lower' than the Sinhalese. The normalisation of the position of the dominant group and 'others' in the textbooks (Naseem, Arshad-Ayaz and Rodríguez, 2016), is another idea that comes out of the youth data, with participants like Neera from Colombo explaining how the Sinhalese community are represented as the true Sri Lankans while Tamils and Muslims are cast as outsiders within the national narrative. The criticisms made by many of the Mullaitivu cohort regarding the excessive focus on Sinhalese kings in the history textbooks, seem to confirm the suspicion voiced in the second chapter that some of the findings of the studies done on Sri Lankan history textbooks in the past such as that by Rasanayagam and Palaniyappan (1999 cited in Wickrema and Colenso, 2003), are still applicable to the revised books. More of Greaney's (2006) criteria for identifying nationalistic histories are also illustrated in the textbooks. That is, the lack of minority history falls under omission and the use of overly flattering adjectives to describe Sinhalese rulers demonstrate the adoption of persuasive techniques which serve to create distinct images of certain groups. Moreover, the impressionability of secondary school students and how it makes them more susceptible to the inculcation of negative stereotypes (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000; Greaney, 2006), is personified by the remarks made by a Sinhalese youth named Piyali from Matara who deemed Tamils as "the invading type."

Furthermore, the opinions expressed by most of the Muslim youth in the study raise interesting questions regarding identity, particularly with respect to the concept of 'adaptive preferences' discussed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, the pioneers of the Capability Approach.

According to Sen (1999, p. 63) “Deprived people tend to come to terms with their deprivation because of the sheer necessity of survival, and they may, as a result, lack the courage to demand any radical change, and may even adjust their desires and expectations to what they unambitiously see as feasible.” The relevance of this to Muslim youth from Ampara is the question of whether the expectations of these youth regarding what it means to be a Sri Lankan national have been adapted to reflect their assigned status in society. The reason for asking this question is because of some of the comparatively different findings that came out of the Ampara district. For instance, only 9 out of the 20-member cohort acknowledged that the history curriculum was mainly focussed on Sinhalese-Buddhists, and 8 participants even maintained the objectively falsifiable claim that all the ethnic groups were equally represented in the textbooks. Additionally, according to the nationality data discussed in the previous chapter, the Sri Lankan identity was strongest in the predominantly Muslim Ampara district, with 75 percent of respondents mentioning ‘Sri Lankan’ as their nationality. Thus, it appears that Muslim youth from the East seem to be in denial about certain types of discrimination faced by their ethnic group, and the fact that despite this discrimination they still predominantly choose to be identified as Sri Lankans, may indicate that their expectation of what it means to be a Sri Lankan could be lower than that of the other ethnic groups.

Although it may not be able to provide a definitive explanation of these findings, the concept of adaptive preferences does help to create a better understanding of the aspirations or motivations of these minority youth. As Bridges (2006) explains, the concept sheds light on how certain external constraints become embedded in an individual, resulting in the lowering of expectations, stifling of creativity and so forth. Thus, while those affected may still believe that the decisions they make are independent, in reality their choices have been adapted to the limits imposed by external constraints. Given that they may have different implications on our preferences, Bridges distinguishes between the different types of constraints that affect individual freedom, settling on five categories: preference limited by natural and more or less immutable constraints; preference limited by the social and economic distribution of opportunity and political prohibition; preference limited by ignorance and/or a failure of rationality; preference limited by socially embedded expectations; and choice limited by the individual’s own perception and construction of herself. Going by this classification, the type of adaptive preference experienced by Muslim youth in the East seems to be preference limited by socially embedded expectations. To borrow from Bridges (2006, p. 21), “The fairly

elementary observation here is that people come to adjust their aspirations, preferences and choices to the circumstances in which they find themselves, to the realistic possibilities which are open to them, to learned expectations about what their role and place is in society and what they may expect from life.” Judging by some of the responses of the Muslim youth in the study, their apparent contentment with the way history is taught in schools, could stem from their subconscious acknowledgement and acceptance of the fact that as a minority they cannot expect equal treatment in relation to the majority.

To understand how this type of adaptive preference could be interrupted through history teaching, it is useful to touch on Appadurai’s (2004) work on aspirations. He argues that improving the capacity to aspire could support the poor to oppose and change their impoverished conditions. Similarly, if history education played its rightful role in relation to nation building by adequately covering the history of all ethno-religious groups in the country and by creating an understanding that people of all races and religions are equal citizens of the nation, it could help to strengthen the capacity to aspire of minority youth. Treating minorities as outsiders within the national narrative on the other hand, may serve to reinforce their sentiment of not having an equal place in society compared to the Sinhalese-Buddhist majority, and thereby heighten their tendency of lowering expectations to adapt to their assigned social circumstances. In fact, when discussing the portrayal of the history of the different ethno-religious groups within history lessons, several Sinhalese-Buddhist youth in the study insightfully identified the need to extend the “Sinhala right”, as one participant put it, to all ethnicities.

Furthermore, the disapproval displayed by many youth from all three ethnic groups towards what they deemed to be a racist inscription made by a Sinhalese king, support Bush and Saltarelli’s (2000) point about students becoming agents of social integration by transmitting tolerant views from the classroom into the community. However, while biased education would not encourage them to do so, it could also have other negative impacts, particularly on minority youth. As Amin (2014) states, misrepresentation of an identity could have adverse consequences on the development of an individual. The underlying animosity and bitterness that accompanied many of the responses of the Tamil participants indicate the impact that the themes of exclusion, negativity and inferiority that characterise the portrayal of Tamils within school history has had on minority youth. Likewise, the opinions certain history teachers and



content creators shared in relation to the imbalance of historical information regarding the minorities, shed light on the impact it has on the identities of Tamil and Muslim students.

## Conclusion

As laid out in the introduction, this chapter aimed to gain a better understanding about the different ethnic groups that constitute the Sri Lankan nation and how they are represented through history education. It began with an analysis of the secondary school history textbooks, focussing on ethnic origins, religion, and the representation of minorities. This revealed that despite a brief acknowledgement of the existence of many theories on the creation of settlements in Sri Lanka, the only theory that is discussed in the textbook is the Aryan myth, which is generally known to pertain to the Sinhalese ethnic group. While the books contain no concrete information on the origins of Tamils and Muslims, by narrating the story through the perspective of the Sinhalese community, they imply that Tamils were South Indian invaders. With respect to religion, Buddhism is given the supreme position, with the protection and promotion of it at all costs being transmitted as an important value that needs to be instilled among the youth of the nation. A clear imbalance in the amount of information presented about the Sinhalese-Buddhist majority compared to the minorities is also visible in the textbooks, with Tamils and Muslims being portrayed as outsiders.

Turning to the participant views that were expressed in relation to the portrayal of ethnic groups within the history curriculum, 64 percent of the total sample of youth believed that there was a clear focus on Sinhalese history compared to that of the minorities. While some of the remaining youth refrained from expressing any distinct views on the matter, 16 percent of the total group shared a conflicting opinion that the history of all ethnic groups is equally represented in the curriculum. It is important to note that an objective reading of the history textbooks of grade 6 to 11 would refute this latter opinion. As such, while it was surprising to hear it being expressed by any participant, it was even more surprising to observe that a majority of those who shared it were Muslim minority youth from the Ampara district. Further findings revealed that unlike the predominantly Tamil group of respondents from Mullaitivu, the Ampara cohort indicated a reluctance to discuss ethnic matters and a preference to suppress their feelings towards them. In fact, the highest ratio of those who stated that Sinhalese history dominated the curriculum belonged to the Mullaitivu group, whose answers were layered with feelings of animosity. Compared to the other districts where at least one participant defended

the imbalance in historical representations, no one from Mullaitivu offered such a justification. Conversely, the highest ratio of respondents who did justify the imbalance belonged to the purely Sinhalese-Buddhist Matara cohort, which also had the highest ratio of those who believed that the amount of history taught about each ethnic group was sufficient. Meanwhile respondents from Colombo displayed the highest capacity for critical analysis, since they provided the most answers relating to the characterisation of the different ethnic groups within the history textbooks.

Emulating the trend in the youth data, a majority of teachers, or 83 percent to be exact, maintained that there was a predominance of Sinhalese history within the curriculum. Using examples, some of them also spoke of the impact that the lack and misrepresentation of minority history has on youth, particularly those of the Tamil community. Out of the six content creators interviewed through the study, three of them agreed with the general opinion that Sinhalese history dominates the curriculum while the three others, who happened to be Sinhalese-Buddhists, disagreed, insisting that the curriculum contained a balanced representation of the history of all the ethnic groups in Sri Lanka. Those who agreed with the premise blamed the lack of minority history on the use of the *Mahavamsa* as the main source of historical information<sup>69</sup>, and they explained that the misrepresentation problem is compounded by translation issues.

With respect to the question regarding ethnically sensitive content, 84 percent of the total group of 70 youth who shared their opinion about the stone inscription made by King Nissankamalla, strongly disagreed with it while the remaining 16 percent viewed it as an appropriate statement. Once again, the Tamil respondents from Mullaitivu were far more outspoken than the rest, freely using terms like ‘racist’ and ‘discriminative’ to get their point across. The highest number of responses which favoured the statement were received from the purely Sinhalese-Buddhist group from Matara, with many of them basing their opinion on a value they may have inherited from the textbooks, the need to protect and promote Buddhism. The interview data then went on to elaborate on the attitudes and capacities of teachers in handling such material and the impact it could have on shaping the perspectives of youth. Several teachers interviewed in the study asserted that they tended to adopt a matter-of-fact approach to dealing with

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<sup>69</sup> Many scholars have also criticized the excessive dependence on the *Mahavamsa* as a source of school history due to its heavy Sinhalese-Buddhist leanings. As Spencer (2002, p. 6) puts it, “a nationalism based upon the Mahavamsa would have to be a Buddhist nationalism with little space for non-Buddhist identities.”

ethnically sensitive subject matter such as this. However, it is rather worrying that most of them did not have a proper background knowledge of the statement, which would have been helpful when discussing such controversial matters with their students.

Finally, the last section of this chapter illuminated the many links that the primary data has with the literature reviewed in this thesis. While three of Greaney's (2006) criteria for judging nationalistic narratives that thwart diversity were identified through the textbooks analysis for instance, many of the findings of similar studies carried out on Sri Lankan textbooks were also corroborated.

## 6. The handling of sensitive matters in modern Sri Lankan history

### Introduction

Impeded by several ethnically sensitive matters throughout the 20th century, the Sri Lankan nation building exercise reached near-total breakdown with the onset of the civil war in 1983. While the process of constructing the nation has resumed following the end of the military conflict in 2009, the factors which led to its demise appear to be fading from national memory. Building on this observation, this chapter aims to investigate the understanding that is being created through history education about the sensitive matters which impeded nation building in the recent past and resulted in the break out of the ethnic conflict.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first identifies the aforementioned controversial matters through an analysis of the salient literature regarding the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict. It then attempts to locate these matters within the history textbooks in order to understand how they are dealt with in the secondary school history curriculum. With the second section investigating youth awareness about these contentious matters, the third looks at the perspectives of other educational stakeholders regarding the complexities of educating the younger generation about their difficult past. Finally, the primary data findings are tied together and collectively analysed in the fourth section, in relation to the relevant literature on the subject.

### 6.1. The sensitive matters and their place in the history textbooks<sup>70</sup>

The final years of British colonialism and the early years of independence in Sri Lanka were peppered with sensitive issues and controversial events, several of which came to have a bearing on the breakout of the ethnic war. As such, the roots of the conflict are believed to have been sown in this period; as elucidated by Tambiah (1986, p. 7) who stated that, “Sinhalese-Tamil tensions and conflicts in the form to us today are of relatively recent manufacture – a

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<sup>70</sup> This section is taken from a previous publication of the author: Warnasuriya, M. (2017) ‘Examining the value of teaching sensitive matters in history: The case of post-war Sri Lanka’, *International Journal of Historical Learning, Teaching and Research [IJHLTR]*, 14 (2), Spring/Summer, p. 93 -107.

truly twentieth century phenomenon.” While the level of agreement on this time frame is quite high (others who support it include Little, 1994; Nayak, 2001; Ghosh, 2003; Clarence, 2007), the discourse regarding the root causes themselves or the contentious matters in question contains more varied opinions and interpretations. However, although they do not form an exhaustive list of causes, there are several matters belonging to these eras which feature prominently in most accounts of the ethnic conflict.<sup>71</sup> Brief discussions of each of them are presented below, followed by analyses of their presence within secondary school history textbooks of Sri Lanka.

- The Tamil minority held a more favourable position than the Sinhalese majority during British colonial times. This is because the significantly higher concentration of missionary schools in the North gave Tamils much better access to education (Ghosh, 2003; Clarence, 2007; Herath, 2007; Perera, 2009). Another contributory factor was that the infertility of the Northern areas led Tamils to place greater importance on education, both as a source of livelihood and as a vehicle of social mobility (Manogaran, 1987; Wijesinha, 2007). Thus, having received better schooling, particularly in the English language, Tamils occupied a disproportionate number of places in higher education and civil administration (Wickrema and Colenso, 2003). Many believe that growing resentment towards these imbalances and calls to bridge them were manifested fully when ruling power was passed from the British to a Sinhalese-majority government.

The history textbooks which cover the British colonial period mention that a knowledge of English was a requirement for government positions; but do not note the inequalities that existed among Sinhalese and Tamils in terms of access to English education and the favourable position that Tamils gained as a result. Instead of discussing these ethnic imbalances, the textbooks focus on elite versus rural inequalities in education and employment that fragmented Sri Lankan society at that time.

- The transition from communal representation towards territorial representation as the mechanism for local participation in the colonial government, as well as the granting of universal franchise, were highly contested issues. While Sinhalese favoured these moves

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<sup>71</sup> There is a vast body of literature on the causes of the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict. Other than for the works cited in this section, some of the prominent contributions to this scholarship include: (Manor, 1984; Kearney, 1985; Vanniasingham, 1989; Gunawardana, 1995; Ismail and Jeganathan, 1995; Wickramasinghe, 1995, 2005; Spencer, 2002; Uyangoda, 2007; Pararajasingham, 2009; Arambewela and Arambewela, 2010; Thiranagama, 2011; Mushtaq, 2012).

based on the numerical strength of their ethnic group, Tamils opposed them for fear that they would not be adequately represented in national politics and would be subjected to Sinhalese domination (Manogaran, 1987; Nissan and Stirrat, 2002; Clarence, 2007). The latter's concerns were disregarded in the Donoughmore constitution of 1931 which abolished communal representation and adopted universal suffrage (Nissan and Stirrat, 2002). According to Nissan and Stirrat (2002) and Gracie (2009) alternative means of protecting minority rights were ineffectual against majority powers.

Communal representation, which is mentioned several times in the textbooks, is introduced in the Grade 9 book as the origin of contemporary communal problems (Educational Publications Department, 2009). It is also referred to as a measure that was going to "bring about detrimental results for the future of the country" (Educational Publications Department, 2007b, p. 23). Although this is clearly a majoritarian perspective, it is the only viewpoint offered to the students. Later on, it is noted that Tamil leaders were against discontinuing communal representation and granting universal franchise. However, the abolishment of the former and the adoption of the latter are referred to as purely positive advancements of the parliamentary system, ignoring minority concerns regarding their potential implications.

- Approximately one million Indian Tamils were stripped of their citizenship and voting rights by the Ceylon Citizenship Act of 1948 and the Indian and Pakistani Residents (Citizenship) Act of 1949, passed by the first post-independent government of Sri Lanka (Nayak, 2001). The officially communicated reasoning for the measures was that Indian Tamils who were brought down by the British as indentured workers and settled in Sinhalese dominated areas of the hill country, were temporary residents and thereby India's responsibility (Manogaran, 1987; Nayak, 2001; Nissan and Stirrat, 2002; Perera, 2009). While many scholars believe that the political motivation of these enactments was to limit the Tamil vote (Manogaran, 1987; Nayak, 2001; Nissan and Stirrat, 2002; Clarence, 2007; Gracie, 2009; Perera, 2009), some add that it was also intended to limit the left-wing vote (Vittachi, 1995; Nayak, 2001; Nissan and Stirrat, 2002; Perera, 2009). The second group further note that many Ceylon Tamils supported this legislation at the time.

This matter is mentioned twice in the grade 9 history textbook. In the first instance the two acts are simply referred to as "important landmarks in the political sphere during the middle

part of the 20th century,” which instated measures enabling Indians and Pakistanis residing in Sri Lanka to legally obtain citizenship (Educational Publications Department, 2009, p. 99). The next mention notes that some Tamils leaders opposed the measure, citing that the government revoked the rights given by the British to the estate Tamils. The depiction of the issue in this manner not only lacks clarity, but it also creates space for confusion since the acts are first presented in a positive light and then shown to be contentious, without further elaboration.

- The ‘Sinhala-Only’ Act which made Sinhala ‘the one official language of Ceylon’ was passed by the House of Representatives in 1956 (Sahadevan and DeVotta, 2006). According to Perera (2009, p. 113) this was “...one of the first inter-ethnic agreements that was broken, for prior to independence, leaders from all communities had agreed that Sinhala and Tamil languages would replace English as the official language of the country.” With Sinhala alone becoming the language of administration, many scholars argue that Tamil speakers were severely affected, particularly in terms of public sector employment and education (Sahadevan and DeVotta, 2006; Wijesinha, 2007; Gracie, 2009; Perera, 2009). Yet, De Silva (2012) holds that as soon as the policy change was legislated, action was taken to alter it so that the language rights of minority Tamils would be recognised in several main areas of state policy. Upon the passing of this bill, a Tamil political party organised a satyagraha (non-violent protest) outside parliament, which led to the development of anti-Tami riots (Perera, 2001; Nissan and Stirrat, 2002; Sahadevan and DeVotta, 2006). While these were the first ethnic riots since independence, they erupted again in 1958 on an even larger scale (Vittachi, 1995).

The ‘Sinhala-Only’ Act is introduced in the textbook under the heading “Implementation of policies respecting social and economic backgrounds, national language, religion and culture” (Educational Publications Department, 2009, p. 103). It is thereby portrayed as a purely positive measure, ignoring its implications on Tamil speakers. The textbook mentions the decision to give Tamil a due place, without elaborating on what that entailed. The broken agreement regarding a dual language policy is also omitted from the discussion. Although reference to “the tense situation caused by the language bill” is made at a later occasion (Educational Publications Department, 2009, p. 117), the riots that erupted over this issue in 1956 and 1958 are left out. Overall, the textbooks give no indication that the

Sinhala-Only issue is widely accepted as one of the main factors that deteriorated ethnic relations in the country.

- Starting from the Gal Oya River Valley Development Scheme in 1948, successive governments implemented policies to resettle people from over populated Sinhalese areas to Tamil speaking areas in the North and East. Commonly referred to as ‘State-aided colonization schemes’, these policies altered the demography of these provinces, as evident from the decline in the Tamil speaking population in the East from 88 percent in 1946 to 75 percent in 1981 (Gracie, 2009). Some scholars believe that disputes over land access were part of the reasons behind the ethnic riots of the 1950s (Nissan and Stirrat, 2002), since as Perera (2009, p. 116) states, “Making the Tamils a minority in areas where they would otherwise have been a majority was an effective step in reducing their legitimacy and political power.”

The grade 11 textbook discusses the creation of agricultural settlements in the dry zone. However, the list of objectives in forming them does not include the government’s alleged political motivations of increasing Sinhalese electorates, and the list of challenges in establishing them fails to mention the opposition raised by Tamil politicians against these so called ‘colonization’ schemes. In fact, the demographic details of the areas chosen for these settlements are kept out of the conversation, as are the ethnic implications of allocating property to thousands of Sinhalese in what the Tamils considered to be their homeland.

- In the early 1970’s the government introduced standardisation policies and a district quota system for university education. These measures were viewed by many as discriminatory forms of affirmative action for the educationally disadvantaged (Clarance, 2007; Wijesinha, 2007; Perera, 2009). As explained by de Silva (2012), the impact of the media-wise standardisation schemes was that the ratio of Tamil to Sinhalese students admitted to the science, engineering and medical faculties of the University of Ceylon at Peradeniya and Colombo changed in favour of the Sinhalese, since a lower qualifying mark was introduced by the government for those who sat for the examinations through the Sinhala medium. The quota system which was designed to favour those from rural backgrounds, also had a detrimental impact on Tamils, particularly those of the North (De Silva, 2012). Leading to a significant decrease in the ratio of Tamil medium students in the universities



(Perera, 2001), according to Wickrema and Colenso (2003, p. 5), “The university admission policies of the 1970s were a landmark in that ethnicity became an official basis for discrimination in national education policy.”

Despite having a section titled “Striking characteristics of the Sri Lankan education sector during the three decades since 1948” (Educational Publications Department, 2015, p. 107), the textbook fails to mention anything regarding the standardisation policies and district quota system. Given the strong opposition raised against these mechanisms and their direct connection to the youth unrest that was prevalent in the 1970s, this omission can be regarded as a clear attempt to avoid dealing with contentious subject matter.

- Owing to the growing frustration of Tamils against Sinhalese dominance; the post-independence period saw the transformation of Tamil demands from equality to self-rule in a separate state, and the escalation of their approaches from peaceful political tactics to separatist warfare. In July 1983, the LTTE assailed and murdered 13 soldiers of the Sri Lankan Army (Clarance, 2007). This attack sparked the deadliest anti-Tamil riots the country had ever witnessed. According to Devotta’s (2006) description of the events, Tamils were hacked to death and burnt in their cars and houses. While the official death count was placed at 400, other reliable sources claimed that it was between 2000-3000, with another 100,000 Tamils being displaced from their homes and approximately 175,000 fleeing abroad as refugees (Clarance, 2007). Known as ‘Black July’, this fatal period of rioting is regarded as the onset of the ethnic conflict.

The local history lessons covered in the textbooks end with the constitutional reform of 1978, which means the historically significant ‘83 riots are not included in the curriculum.

To sum up, the aspects discussed above paint a picture of how relationships between the Sinhalese and Tamils gradually soured in the recent past, leading to the outbreak of the civil war. The analysis regarding the appearance of these matters in history textbooks reveals that they are either glossed over by focusing on a majority perspective and by omitting key pieces of information; or else they are completely ignored. This is not surprising, considering that the version of history presented in the books bears all the hallmarks of an official master narrative. That is, the textbook provides one distinct account of the past, leaving no room for interpretation and not even alluding to the possibility of plurality in interpretation.

## 6.2. Youth understanding of the sensitive matters

Having identified the sensitive matters which hindered the construction of the Sri Lankan nation during the 20th century, this section looks at how those matters are perceived and understood by the younger generation. In other words, youth awareness regarding the root causes of the ethnic conflict is analysed under this subheading. To minimize subjectivity, the categorization applied to the responses was based on the general consensus derived through the literature regarding the contentious matters that led to the war, which are discussed above. As such, the answers received from the youth to the question regarding the factors that led to the ethnic conflict were broadly classified as specific responses and non-specific responses. It was possible to further divide the specific answers into three subcategories: causes relating to education, language and political representation. For the sake of transparency, the nonspecific responses were also subdivided. While some answers were related to minority rights and equality and others focused on the Tamil demand for a separate state, the term ‘vague’ was applied to a variety of responses which contained ambiguous suggestions as to what caused the breakout of the civil war. Since many youth provided multiple responses, the total number of answers received exceeded the total sample size of 81. However, it is possible to identify the percentage of youth who provided specific responses, non-specific responses and no response at all; in terms of each district and in terms of the total sample from all four districts. This information is presented in the table below. In analyzing the data, the findings from each district are individually scrutinized, before entering into a general discussion of the results.

**Table 17: Classification of youth responses regarding the causes of the conflict**

District	Specific Response	Non-specific Response	No Response
Matara	5% (1/20)	90% (18/20)	5% (1/20)
Mullaitivu	37% (7/19)	53% (10/19)	10% (2/19)
Ampara	15% (3/20)	70% (14/20)	15% (3/20)
Colombo	41% (9/22)	41% (9/22)	18% (4/22)
<b>Total</b>	<b>25% (20/81)</b>	<b>63% (51/81)</b>	<b>12% (10/81)</b>

### 6.2.1. Responses of the Matara cohort

Only one respondent from Matara offered what can be considered as a specific answer to the question regarding the causes of the ethnic conflict. This response, which was related to the language issue, is as follows:

First the Sinhala-Tamil thing arose by the act that made Sinhala the state language. After that only, there was Black July. In Black July a lot of Tamil people were killed right... so Tamil people got angry with Sinhala people. That is, a hatred developed. After that only a division like this arose. There is a Tamil group like this... there is a Sinhala group like this... up to today it is divided like this. That was a reason for terrorism to be there as well.

(Nalindrini, 19 year old Sinhalese-Buddhist female)

This response was delivered in a very confident and matter-of-fact manner, devoid of any emotion. Being a Sinhalese, Nalindrini did not seem to have any qualms about acknowledging the misdeeds of the Sinhalese people in the past. She went on to add that the Sinhalese caused a problem for the Tamils in Jaffna as well. This willingness to acknowledge the ills of the past can be seen in the responses of two other youth who spoke of the deprivation of Tamil rights. One response for instance was,

The way I see it, the minorities in this country... were treated as a minority... we... the Sinhala ethnic group was given special treatment, while the other people were like put to a side... without giving those people their rights.

(Akvan, 19 year old Sinhalese-Buddhist male)

The factual inconsistencies that plagued the answers of many youth could be attributed to ideas that they formed on the basis of inaccurate and/or incomplete information gained through various sources. One respondent for instance, held that the Tamils waged war against the Sinhalese because they wanted a separate place for themselves in the North. He did not however connect this demand to the minority rights issue. Instead he shared an anecdote about a party that was held in the Northern province at which a small clash that erupted between a group of Sinhalese and Tamils was taken too far, leading to the onset of the war. This type of folk history that youth are exposed to often remains unchecked or unchallenged through history education offered in Sri Lankan schools.

As explained above, one participant from Matara mentioned the language problem that played a role in arousing ethnic tensions. Two believed the war started because the Tamils were not granted equal rights, but they were unable to elaborate further on the allegation. Ruvin, the respondent who brought up the separate state issue on the other hand, did elaborate on his

answer but his explanation was factually flawed and rested on anecdotal evidence. One participant claimed to not know anything at all about the causes of the ethnic conflict. Finally, the responses of the remaining 15 youth from the 20 member Matara cohort, could be described as ‘vague’ at best. Several of them simply suggested that misunderstandings or selfishness were to blame, as shown in the following examples.

... the war began because the Sinhala people didn’t understand the Tamil people.

(Damayanthi, 19 year old Sinhalese-Buddhist female)

The only reason for that... that is, I can say as far as I know... the Sinhalese think the country is only theirs, the Tamils think the country is only theirs... it’s mostly because of that selfishness that problems occurred.

(Akushla, 20 year old Sinhalese-Buddhist female)

A few respondents cited caste differences as one of the factors that created ethnic tensions, although there is a high possibility that what they were referring to were in fact class divisions that emerged during colonial times. Moreover, the responses of certain participants displayed the ‘us-them’ tendency discussed in the literature, whereby the minorities were regarded as outsiders. The response of a Sinhalese-Buddhist youth named Thamindu, who said, “Tamil people wanted to capture *our* country”, is a case in point.

An observation that came out from several interviews in this group was that the answers offered by the youth regarding the roots of conflict were guesses based on personal beliefs or general opinion, rather than statements based on acquired knowledge. That is, many responses were blotted with phrases like ‘it could have been that’, ‘it may have been because’ etc. This point is encapsulated in the answer of one respondent who stated the following when asked what caused the war.

We haven’t been taught in school. I think these people must have risen to get a higher position than the social status they had.

(Aven, 19 year old Sinhalese-Buddhist male)

While it is encouraging to see youth critically assessing past events to come up with possible answers to the questions posed, it can be argued that better information provided through school would give them a stronger foundation upon which to build up their knowledge.

### 6.2.2. Responses of the Ampara cohort

Specific responses to the question regarding the causes of the ethnic conflict were offered by three participants or else 15 percent of the Ampara group. Rizah, a 22-year-old Muslim, attributed the break out of the war to a quota system in education and politics through which Tamil rights were ignored since the Sinhalese were the majority. He went on to share his view that despite the deprivation of their rights, the Tamils should not have asked for a separate state. This reaction indicates that not all minority citizens are guaranteed to share the ‘anti-majority’ or ‘anti-government’ sentiment which many believe would be promoted if the contentious matters of the past were candidly discussed within the history curriculum.

The language issue was brought up by two respondents. While one gave it more prominence than religious divisions, the other differentiated it from the rights issue by saying,

Basically, it was the language problem in the country those days and now it has changed as the... problem of rights.

(Siraj, 22 year old Muslim male)

It is interesting to note that Siraj did not consider language rights as one of the rights that Tamils were seeking equality for, but placed it in a category of its own. He also did not explain what in fact the ‘problem of rights’ entailed. It can be argued that Siraj, like many youth in this study, has only a surface understanding of these controversial matters. More support for this argument can be found by looking at the answers of the other five participants who mentioned the minority rights issue. None of them could explain which rights were deprived or why inequality existed. One participant added that the deprivation of their rights led the Tamils to ask for a separate land. Yet, the rest of the responses were brief and basic as indicated by that of Adnaan, who simply said, “Proper rights were not given to the Tamil people by Sinhala people.”

This tendency to offer extremely simple answers that lacked depth was a common trend. While a couple of youth cited misunderstandings as the cause of the conflict, another two youth simply attributed it to racism. For example, one of their responses to this question which was worded, ‘in your opinion what are the causes of the ethnic war that took place in the country for 26 years?’ was, “The problem of majority-minority. And racism.” Meanwhile another participant’s attempt to provide a more profound answer led to him making an exaggerated claim, as evident below.

Because they had to implement their authority... Buddhist people... they had to implement their authority... and to decrease the Tamil people's growth... they had to slave them... they intended to slave the Tamil people. It started like this.

(Fazry, 20 year old Muslim male)

Although it was heavily inflated, the above response could be considered to have some base in public opinion. The basis of the responses of three other participants however, remain a mystery. One claimed that the past rulers imposed a special tax such as the Value-Added Tax (VAT) on those who were not from their own ethnic group, in order to burden them. Another narrated a long story about an important Tamil doctor who died while leading a hunger protest, believing his death to be the reason that the Tamil people resorted to violence. Finally, the third participant, Hafeel, held that a Sinhalese person murdered the sister of Velupillai Prabhakaran<sup>72</sup>, the leader of the LTTE, which made him start hating all Sinhalese people. The Sinhalese people in turn began hating all Tamils because of their feelings towards Prabhakaran. Thus, began the war, according to Hafeel. These factually empty claims show the power that folk history could have in spreading misinformation and highlight the need to counter it through formal education. The three remaining participants from Ampara claimed to have no knowledge at all about the causes of the ethnic conflict.

### 6.2.3. Responses of the Mullaitivu cohort

Starting with those who provided specific responses to the question regarding the causes of the ethnic conflict, three respondents cited the problem related to 'rating in education'. Although they did not mention specific details such as names or dates, it was evident from their brief explanations that they were referring to the standardization policies and quota system introduced in the 1970s which were allegedly disadvantageous for Tamil students. Six youth including two of those who spoke of this education issue, knew about the language problem as well. While they all mentioned the Sinhala Only Act, two of them even made a reference to the year that it was passed.

It is interesting to analyse the response of one participant, Diyan. In explaining how the war began, he stated that the problems started with the education issue, and when the Tamils brought it up the government were somewhat receptive to their concerns. Therefore, he said

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<sup>72</sup> See Glossary.

the Tamils thought they could ask for more, which led them to request '50-50 rights'. According to him these further demands made the Sinhalese feel that the Tamils were trying to gain too much power, and they thereby implemented the Sinhala Only Act to curtail such attempts. Considering that the language act was passed in the 1950s and the problematic education policies only came up in the 1970s, his timeline and pattern of causation are clearly flawed. Given that the Sinhala Only Act is briefly mentioned in school history lessons whereas the education policies are not, it can be surmised that his theory is based on a combination of information obtained through formal education and informal sources. While his critical thinking skills are admirable, it could be argued that a more comprehensive handling of these matters through the history curriculum would be greatly helpful in developing his pattern of reasoning. The same could be said about another respondent, Kaushiyan, who also got confused about the historical timeline relating to these issues. She claimed that since the Tamils were pushed back by the Sinhalese, President J.R. Jayawardene<sup>73</sup> promised to grant them equal rights when he came into power, but then went back on his word by passing the Sinhala Only Act. This is factually incorrect because the Act was passed in 1956 during S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike's<sup>74</sup> time in office, whereas J.R. Jayawardene only became president in 1978.

Problems relating to political representation were brought up by two respondents. One of them touched on some specific details about past leaders and the agreements made between the Sinhalese and Tamils. The other however, broadly blamed the origin of the conflict on the differing objectives of each ethnic group and their leaders. In her words,

...first it started just because Sinhalese were trying to take the power and they were trying to give priority to their ethnicity. And also after that... all these years it continued just because both of the ethnic groups, they had their own leaders... and they wanted a separate country... like the Tamils they wanted a separate country and also the Tamil ethnic group they had their own leader from their community... and Sinhalese they had their own leader from their community. So, that's why the war happened.

(Arvindi, 20 year old Tamil-Hindu female)

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<sup>73</sup> See Glossary.

<sup>74</sup> See Glossary.

Another response worth taking a closer look at is that of a youth named Lokesh. His take on the roots of the conflict is as follows:

...the main reason the war started was the rating for the education [sic]... for the universities and the students... And also in the earlier histories it says that G.G. Ponnambalam<sup>75</sup>... he asked for 50-50 rights for Tamils and Sinhalese but it was denied. And also after that Selva-Dudley agreement... but it was also denied. And also in 1951 they passed this Only Sinhala Act. And these are the things that told the Tamils that they are like stopping the Tamils from getting their own rights... so that's why they started to fight against the government.

(Lokesh, 24 year old Tamil-Hindu male)

By touching upon the educational, political and language related factors that led to the war and exhibiting knowledge of particular actors and actions related to that controversial period, Lokesh proved to be the most well-informed youth from all those interviewed in the study. However, he was also one of the three youth out of the total sample of 81, who said that school was not their main source of historical knowledge. In fact, he insisted that he mainly learned history through the media because he felt that the history written in school books favoured one side. While Lokesh's interest in history and current affairs led him to read widely and seek alternate sources of information to learn about the past, it is clear that not all youth share a similar enthusiasm for the subject. For most youth, school lessons are their only means of learning history. It would thereby be helpful if history education offered through schools was more comprehensive, particularly when it comes to covering modern history with all its ups and downs.

Overall, seven out of the total group of 19 youth from Mullaitivu provided what can loosely be considered as specific responses to the question regarding the origins of the conflict. The fact that this ratio is higher than that of the Matara and Ampara districts is not surprising given that Mullaitivu was one of the worst affected areas of the war and most of the cohort are Tamil. As such, it would be reasonable to assume that those who were directly affected by the violence would have a greater awareness about the conflict and its causes compared to those who were less affected. However, what is surprising is that this figure still is not very high. Despite living in a district which was ravaged by the war, and was in fact under the control of the LTTE for a

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<sup>75</sup> See Glossary.



long period, only 37 percent of the youth interviewed in Mullaitivu were able to provide specific answers about the factors that led to the conflict. This clearly necessitates further discussion about the role that formal education plays in teaching Sri Lankan youth about the country's troubled past.

Moving on to the non-specific responses, nine youth including most of those who mentioned education and language issues, spoke of the deprivation of minority rights. Four participants also brought up the Tamil demand for a separate state, with three of them attributing it to the need to secure equal rights. Compared to the answers of youth from other districts, the responses of these youth were more emotionally charged and passionate. Govinda for instance held that,

...they didn't give the full rights of the Tamils and also... Tamils thought that they can't be slaves for the majority people so they wanted a separate state.

(Govinda, 21 year old Tamil-Hindu male)

Some of their responses also contained a certain respect for activism and a sense of pride regarding the actions of Tamils in the past. This is exemplified by the following answer.

The person who was ruling the country at that time... he would have stopped the rights of the Tamils and he would have stopped respecting the minority... or respecting the other race people. So, that's why the minority people, they started to talk for themselves... they spoke... and they stood up for themselves.

(Danesh, 18 year old Tamil-Hindu male)

It is also interesting to note that most youth stated that the Tamils fought against the government to obtain equal rights, instead of stating that they fought against the Sinhalese. It was evident that they viewed the conflict not so much as a Sinhalese-Tamil issue, but rather as a majority-minority issue which was caused by the government's unequal treatment of the two groups. Furthermore, one of the respondents, Kamilia, made it a point to mention that she believed that the cause of the Tamils or the reason they started the fight was justified since they were merely seeking equality, but she did not condone their use of violence as a weapon to achieve this goal. By attesting to the maturity of many participants who had completed secondary school only a few years before, these revelations contradict the argument that students need to be taught a sanitized version of history because their emotional intelligence is not sufficiently developed to deal with certain sensitive matters.

Six participants in the Mullaitivu cohort came up with extremely vague suggestions as to what caused the war. The response of Praveena given below is a good example.

Just because they had competitions between ethnic groups... like kind of finding who is the best... so they fought with each other. Then they took violence as a key to fight for this... to compete in this competition... so then it became a war.

(Praveena, 20 year old Tamil-Hindu female)

Following this ‘competition’ theme, another youth held that caste differences were at the root of the conflict since they wanted to see, “who is the high caste and who is the low caste.” In her view this eventually became an ethnic contest, the aim of which was to identify who held the higher position. Some other misguided responses included the assertion that the Tamils were fighting for the throne and that the shrines of the other religions were destroyed by the majority. While the lack of depth of these answers, among other things, is disconcerting; the fact that they came from youth who have known nothing but war throughout their lives, makes them all the more surprising. Additionally, two participants admitted that they did not know anything about the origins of the conflict. It is interesting to note that these participants were two of the only three Muslims in the Mullaitivu cohort and they displayed a general lack of interest when questioned about the ethnic problem.

#### 6.2.4. Responses of the Colombo cohort

Specific responses relating to education, language and politics were provided by nine out of 22, or 41 percent, of the Colombo cohort. Just as in the case of Lokesh from Mullaitivu, the respondent who provided the most comprehensive answer, touching upon the three factors mentioned above, declared that her knowledge on the causes of the war did not come from learning the subject of history. As she explained,

We were not taught that... it was not in our history syllabus. But still it was in our political science syllabus... it’s an optional subject for the A/L Arts stream. So, I think the origin was the Sinhala Only Act and not giving considerable representation to Tamil ethnic groups and trying to limit their rights like university admission.

(Wasanthi, 22 year old Sinhalese-Christian female)

If this respondent had not chosen to study political science for her GCE A/L examination, it is fair to say that her knowledge of the contentious matters in local history is likely to have been at the same low level as her colleagues whose historical education stopped at grade 11. As such, although it is encouraging to see that sensitive issues are dealt with through the subject of political science, only the limited number of students who choose it as one of their three subject requirements for A/Ls would benefit from the endeavor. The subject of history on the other hand, has a far greater outreach since it is a compulsory subject at the secondary school level in all state schools.

The passing of the Sinhala Only Act was cited by three respondents including Wasanthi, as the origin of the ethnic problem. Connecting it to the decrease in Tamil representation in politics, these Sinhalese youth displayed a mature understanding of the issue. This again indicates that many youth do have the capacity to deal with sensitive matters and that acknowledging the mistakes made by one's ancestors and embracing one's ethnic identity are not mutually exclusive.

The group of eight respondents who brought up political factors were split in the middle, with half blaming the motives and actions of politicians for the onset of the war and the other half attributing the ethnic problem to the decline in minority representation in politics. The former group displayed a strong animosity towards politicians, both past and present, for misleading the public and planting false ideas in their minds about ethnic troubles. In the words of Hansanie,

Actually, there is no ethnic problem in Sri Lanka. There is a problem of politics. Politicians only do this... they are emphasizing that we have these kinds of things. But we don't have such a thing. But the people... they believe in politicians.

(Hansanie, 24 year old Sinhalese-Buddhist female)

She went on to explain that trusting the word of politicians is futile because they are "greedy for power" and thereby their political agenda does not coincide with that of the common man. Quite a profound answer was offered by another youth who said that,

I think it is politicians who should assume the blame for everything. Their objective when they were ruling was to use nationalism to gain political power and to make their rule easy. That happens in the North and the South. I think it is a never-ending thing.

(Imesh, 22 year old Sinhalese-Buddhist male)

The reference to North and South here applies to Tamil and Sinhalese leaders since the population in those areas are predominantly Tamil and Sinhalese respectively. Once again it is heartening to hear a balanced and mature viewpoint from a participant, indicating that ethnic identity does not necessarily have a bearing on one's understanding of contentious subjects. The same cannot be said about Hansanie, the Sinhalese youth mentioned earlier, however, since throughout her interview she made many complaints about minority citizens while at the same time claiming that there were no ethnic tensions in Sri Lanka. Her answers seemed to embody the majoritarian perspective that leaps out of the history textbooks. For instance, despite certain other youth highlighting the problem of minorities not being adequately represented, Hansanie strongly condemned the use of communal representation, believing it to be the catalyst of ethnic tensions. While the legitimacy of this point is up for debate, it is the exact assertion that is made in the history textbook. Although her views cannot be definitively linked to the book, it is reasonable to assume that what she learned in school could have had some sort of impact on her thinking.

In terms of non-specific responses, the Colombo cohort provided a variety of interesting ideas. Some were common views which came out from the other districts as well, such as misunderstandings, greed for power, the Tamil desire for a separate land, and the ill-treatment of the Tamils by the Sinhalese. Others however, were less common. One youth for instance cited land and poverty as the reasons for the war, explaining that since Jaffna and Eelam were close to South India, Prabhakaran wanted to separate them from the rest of country and live a luxurious life there. Another participant maintained that since people were different, they wanted different rights. Prashan, a Sinhalese youth, provided this seemingly profound answer,

So, you can't really choose sides. But I think it's the author of history who really created the rift between the two groups.

(Prashan, 19 year old Sinhalese-Buddhist male)

Expanding on this thought, he used the Elara-Dutugemunu story to explain that the writers of ancient history portrayed the Tamils in a negative light and the Sinhalese in a positive light,

thereby inculcating similar perceptions of each group in the minds of the public. While there definitely is some truth to this argument, there is also a naivety in judging it to be the sole reason for the breakdown in ethnic relations.

A somewhat surprising finding that emerged from this group is the lack of reference to the catastrophic '83 riots, which are generally considered to be the start of the civil war. Given that this historically significant anti-Tamil pogrom began and was most severe in Colombo, it is odd that it was only mentioned by two respondents, both of whom mistook the year that it occurred. While one brought up "that big issue" that occurred sometime in the 80s, and finally landed on 1986, the other said the conflict began,

...because of that Tamil war... 86 or something right? That first war... I don't know about that.

(Hashintha, 20 year old Sinhalese-Buddhist female)

When asked to elaborate on why this so called "Tamil war" erupted, she maintained that it was because the Sinhalese were ignoring the Tamils. Answers such as these, which stand in stark contrast to some of the more well thought out responses discussed above, indicate the importance of helping youth to deepen their understanding of historically poignant events; as do the responses of the four remaining youth from this district who claimed to not have any knowledge at all on the causes of the ethnic conflict that ravaged the country for over two decades.

#### 6.2.5. General findings

Out of the total sample of 81 youth, 25 percent provided specific answers to the question regarding the factors that led to the ethnic conflict. With 12 percent of youth being unable to offer any response, the answers of the remaining 63 percent of participants fell into the non-specific category. These figures reveal the startling lack of knowledge and understanding that is prevalent among Sri Lankan youth regarding the roots of the ethnic conflict, despite the fact that they were born during the civil war and lived through it for most of their lives.

When it comes to the subcategory of responses that were labelled as 'vague', the group of youth from the Matara district stood out by providing almost double the number of ambiguous answers than youth from any other district. It is worth noting that Matara is a predominantly Sinhalese district with over 94 percent of the population being Sinhalese (Department of

Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka, 2015). Interestingly, although Matara had the highest number of participants who gave vague responses, it had the lowest number of participants who gave no response at all. Even though they did not have much knowledge on the causes of the war, Matara youth apparently preferred to take a stab at the question based on their personal beliefs rather than declining to answer. It is important to note that the opinions expressed by these Sinhalese youth as well as those from Colombo, were generally balanced or unbiased, with only a few displaying somewhat racist attitudes.

In fact, many Sinhalese youth displayed the capacity to acknowledge the misdeeds of their ancestors without letting it affect the current attachment they felt towards their ethnic group. Likewise, several minority youth showed a willingness to condemn the demands of the Tamil separatists and their use of violence. Whichever side of the issue they may be on, these findings demonstrate the ability of youth to handle sensitive matters in a mature fashion.

Another observation that can be made from the data is that the number of responses that referred to the deprival of Tamil rights was highest in the Mullaitivu district with the Ampara district coming in second. No respondents from Colombo and only two respondents from Matara mentioned this problem of unequal rights. The relevance of the past to contemporary issues is exemplified through this finding, given that the participant groups from the former districts consisted purely of minority youth. It was also not surprising to note that the answers of the Tamil cohort from the war torn district of Mullaitivu were comparatively more passionate and emotional than those of the other groups.

Although 78 out of 81 youth or in other words 96 percent of the total youth sample declared that school was the main source through which they learned history, many of their responses revealed the power of folk history in shaping their beliefs and ideas. Several respondents made outlandish suggestions regarding the origin of ethnic problems, based on anecdotal evidence which they had gathered from their respective hometowns. This trend was highest in the Ampara district. Interestingly, two of the most informative answers were provided by youth who explicitly stated that their knowledge about the causes of the conflict was not derived from history lessons taught in school.

Yet another trend that was visible among youth across all four districts, was the tendency to provide extremely basic and superficial responses to the serious and complex question regarding the factors that led to the ethnic conflict. Given that the average age of the total group

was 20, it was somewhat puzzling to receive such rudimentary answers, which were at times limited to a word or two. Moreover, many of the responses which delved slightly deeper, were riddled with factual inconsistencies that appeared to stem from unreliable and incomplete sources of information.

This general lack of awareness regarding controversial matters of the past goes against a popular opinion shared by the youth cohort that the purpose of learning history is to use past experiences to shape the future by not repeating mistakes. Twenty respondents touted the value of learning lessons from the past, with one of them explaining it in the following manner.

So, learning history is important to know about the past... of what has happened already...and to make sure that those things... those mistakes... that we are not going to make it in the future [sic].

(Kamilia, 20 year old Tamil-Hindu female)

Compounding her answer by bringing in the importance of communal history, a youth from Mullaitivu named Kaushiyani, stated the following.

... also the things that people have done to our ethnic group... like say for example if the government have [sic] done something to ethnic groups... so just to... learn from the mistakes... we should know the history of Sri Lanka and also about... generally we should know the history of our ethnic group.

(Kaushiyani, 20 year old Tamil-Hindu female)

This sentiment regarding the need to learn about the history and past struggles of all ethnic groups was strong among the predominantly Tamil Mullaitivu cohort. Seven out of the ten youth who mentioned it when asked about the purpose of learning history, were from Mullaitivu. We should learn the subject, as one of them briefly put it,

To just know about the religious and ethnic divisions in the past and also to know the history of the country.

(Anita, 19 year old Tamil-Hindu female)

The general findings discussed above support the argument that dealing with sensitive and contentious matters in secondary school, particularly those relating to modern Sri Lankan

history, would provide youth with a stronger foundation of knowledge upon which to build up their perspectives about historical as well as contemporary issues.

### 6.3. Educational stakeholder opinions on the handling of sensitive matters through history education

The previous sections shed light on how the sensitive matters which challenged the Sri Lankan nation building exercise in the recent past are discussed in the history textbooks, as well as on the level of understanding youth possess about the said matters. This section supplements those findings with the views of other educational stakeholders interviewed as part of the study, namely, history teachers, content creators and academics. These participants were posed with the following question: ‘The history curriculum has been criticized by some scholars for ignoring or not including some of the contentious issues in the country’s past, particularly those which are widely considered to be the root causes of the war. What is your opinion of this criticism?’ As those who are well versed in history and play an important role in delivering the subject to students, it is important to find out what these respondents think about how sensitive matters are currently handled and how they should be handled within the secondary school history curriculum. Consisting of both descriptive and prescriptive opinions, the following discussion also broaches the challenges involved in dealing with contentious matters through history education.

#### 6.3.1. Views of history teachers

Out of the sample of 12 teachers, 9 of them agreed with the criticism explained in the question and were in favour of including contentious matters into the secondary school history curriculum. Their reasoning was that students should be made fully aware of their history, including the problems of the past. One of them connected this knowledge requirement to the exercise of nation building, stating,

So, when they know the history only they can build the nations by correcting the mistakes, learning from the past... they can build the nation.

(Ms. Saakshi, a Tamil-Hindu teacher from Mullaitivu)

Referring to the ethnic war in particular, further sentiments of Ms. Saakshi, were explained by the translator in the following manner.



So, they didn't tell the real stories/real problems that caused the ethnic war/ethnic conflict in the country. So, her opinion is that students should know it. Students should know everything.

Another teacher from Matara elaborated on this idea of educating youth about the ethnic war, stating,

That's why I think modern political history is considered to be extremely important... through that we can analyze how such a problem went so far... but I think it would be better if it was more descriptive than it is. That means, it is good if history lessons from the end of independence up to now are more descriptive. Moreover, I think it would be good if the fact that the requests made by the Tamil people about the devolution of power and the rejections they faced were an issue from the multi ethnic side, was explained or highlighted more. Otherwise, we see ethnicity as ethnic conflict.

(Mr. Imantha, a Sinhalese-Buddhist teacher)

When speaking of the ethnic problem in the country, both a Tamil teacher from Mullaitivu and a Sinhalese teacher from Matara made the same unusual point. They claimed that the ethnic war was a part of the history of Tamils rather than the nation as a whole, and thereby held that it was important for Tamil students to be taught more about it. Explaining her point, Ms. Nalika for instance claimed,

My opinion is this... the war that happened... it was an ethnic war right that took place in Sri Lanka... it was actually not a war that developed among the Sinhalese... it was among the Tamil people... in the sense it arose from them, right?... So, it is in their history. But in our (referring to the Sinhalese) history syllabus I think the amount that is said about it is enough. But I tend to think that more information about it should be given to Tamil children... but since the history syllabus is one... so then there is a question of whether it is sufficient.

(Ms. Nalika, a Sinhalese-Buddhist teacher from Matara)

What makes this an unusual opinion is that the Sri Lankan civil war which progressed into a full-fledged armed conflict between the Sinhalese majority government and a Tamil separatist group called the LTTE, was generally known as a war between Sinhalese and Tamils. As such,

it is very much a part of the history of the country as a whole. It is difficult to categorise it as a purely Tamil issue since it stemmed from tensions between Tamils and the Sinhalese majority government rather than tensions between Tamils themselves.

Three of the 12 teachers disagreed with the criticism in question and believed that sensitive matters should not be included in the history curriculum. As Mr. Bathiya, a Sinhalese-Buddhist teacher from Matara, claimed, “If you include these it will promote racial issues.”

Even one of the teachers from Mullaitivu who held that contentious issues should be included in the textbooks, warned that it should be done in a way that does not promote racism or discrimination. In her words,

... it shouldn't be a thing to promote racism... like just because they did to us like this [sic], so we have to fight with them... so it shouldn't be a kind of thing like that.

(Ms. Lucia, a Tamil-Hindu teacher)

She thus noted that teachers should be careful not to promote these ills, but rather to just make students aware of “the history of Tamils”. However, with the aim of creating such an awareness, she admitted to teaching older students the “real story”, while at the same time warning them to only write what is in the book when facing examinations since they will be penalised by those who mark the exam papers if they bring up past allegations of racism. Mr. Lokesh from Mullaitivu was also passionate about teaching what he called the “real history” including the “real causes of the war”, alongside the content of the state issued textbooks. In fact, he confessed to presenting a disclaimer of sorts to students at the beginning of each lesson by saying the following about the history textbook.

This is just for your exams... so study this for your exams but it is not 100 percent true... whatever is stated here is not 100 percent true.

(Mr. Lokesh, a Tamil-Hindu teacher)

Given that teachers are sometimes conflicted since they have to teach whatever is given in the textbooks even if it contradicts their known reality, he explained that this was how he chose to overcome the issue. However, the methods described could be seen as controversial and somewhat risky ways of dealing with the challenges of teaching history in a plural society, since they could affect the confidence of students regarding the validity of what they learn in

school and they could create feelings of animosity in students towards the state through which the textbooks are issued.

### 6.3.2. Views of history content creators

Only the two non-Sinhalese-Buddhist members of the team of history content creators explicitly agreed with the criticism that some of the contentious issues of the country's past are either omitted from or ignored in the history curriculum. Referring to the issues, one of them stated,

That is right. Yes, in general, other than for mentioning it lightly, it is not included in a way that has an impact on students' minds to a large extent.

(Mr. Mohamed, a Muslim history content creator)

When asked if he thinks that it is a good idea to explain these matters a bit more clearly to students, Mr. Mohamed answered,

Yes, yes. We definitely need to do that, right? We can do it and from there we can create national peace and unity.

Mr. Kularatne on the other hand, believed that it was inappropriate to teach about such contentious matters to secondary school students, given their tender age. His reasoning was as follows.

Actually, those type of matters are controversial no. Putting things like that in texts... those are alright for research level books. Including those types of matters in books that are given to students is not so suitable.

(Mr. Kularatne, a Sinhalese-Buddhist history content creator)

Meanwhile, the other three members disagreed with the criticism by insisting that the controversial matters in question are in fact already included in the curriculum. As Mr. Ariyaratne explained,

Modern history is definitely there. In the British period, from the day that Lanka came under Britain in 1815 up to 48 when this country gained independence, the constitutional reforms... all those are there. Then after receiving independence in 48, all the changes that happened in the constitutions of this country until recently are

there... about how the economy changed, then about how the society changed. Then about the riots that happened in that time... about how the population faced them... all those things are there in that syllabus according to that time.

(Mr. Ariyaratne, a Sinhalese-Buddhist history content creator)

While Mr. Ariyaratne's assertion is correct to a large extent, what he fails to mention is that some of the ethnically sensitive matters that led to the war in particular, are either glossed over or ignored when teaching modern history, or else they are presented through a majoritarian perspective. Even the riots he mentioned are those that took place in the 19th century against British rule, rather than the ones that took place after independence. The historically poignant '83 riots which are considered to be the most immediate cause of the war for instance, are not included in the curriculum.

Although they disagreed with the criticism that certain contentious issues that led to the war are not included in the curriculum, Prof. Ediriweera and Ms. Dissanayaka admitted that those matters have only been lightly touched upon. When asked if students can understand what led to the war by learning history in school, Prof. Ediriweera stated,

They do not acquire enough about that from the textbook because a very simple understanding has been given about the period after independence.

(Prof. Ediriweera, a Sinhalese-Buddhist history content creator)

Ms. Dissanayaka asserted that the reason for glossing over these matters was to prevent ethnic tensions from resurfacing. In her words,

... how do we supportively work together with everyone for a multicultural society? Then when it comes to certain things, even if incidents have really happened in history, we mention things like that very lightly and make the curriculum in a way that, that is protected.

(Ms. Dissanayaka, a Sinhalese-Buddhist history content creator)

Using a specific example to elaborate her point, she said,

Then wherever there is some sort of conflict, now we... we have the Sinhala-Muslim struggle. But we don't put those as they are itself. There we get soft. We see how we can put this in a way that does not give rise to a conflict.

Yet, she held that racism is often provoked through the media, thereby undermining the efforts taken through the curriculum to prevent ethnic disharmony. Her sentiments were shared by Mr. Kularatne who explained the difficulties of teaching sensitive matters to students in a multi ethnic context.

Now one is that there are problems in our country no... So, these should be written in a way that does not have any impact on them. Because actually if you look at it, in previous times we say no there were Sinhala-Tamil riots, Sinhala-Muslim riots... those religious clashes etc. So, when it comes to things like this sometimes there are difficulties in presenting information to children. Because this is something that goes to the whole country no... it goes to Tamil children and Sinhala children and Muslims. Then this job has to be done without being biased towards one side, even if it's difficult.

(Mr. Kularatne, a Sinhalese-Buddhist history content creator)

Mr. Kularatne further noted that the very reason that ethnically contentious matters are not discussed in the curriculum is to prevent the emergence of controversies. His full argument is as follows.

So, to a large extent when writing history, in the recent period it's mostly the sides that do not have controversies that are taken. Now let's think, in school the children have until 1978. So, in that we do not go much into things like ethnic issues. What we go into are like economic, political sides. So, we do not go into recent things much because controversies can arise from that.

Nevertheless, when speaking of the goals of teaching history Mr. Kularatne himself touted the importance of correcting mistakes by learning about the issues of the past. He noted that if we properly knew the details of recent events, we could prevent them from recurring in the future. Thus, his objectives of avoiding controversy and learning lessons from the past appear to be in conflict with each other.

Prof. Ediriweera also attributed the light treatment of recent issues to the inability to cover the entire history of Sri Lanka in the school syllabus. As she explained,

... the syllabus that our children have is too long. The whole history of Lanka has to be taught no. So, when teaching the whole history of Lanka, all those details cannot be put into the syllabus. So, because of that after independence what we have focused on to a

large extent is constitutional history. So, if there were other things, they were mentioned only lightly. So, then what there is in other books about the problems that were there at that time... we teach students to read them.

(Prof. Ediriweera, a Sinhalese-Buddhist history content creator)

While this is a legitimate argument, it does not seem to apply to the periods before independence, particularly to ancient Sri Lankan history where almost all Sinhalese kings are extensively written about including the names of each and every temple and lake they constructed during their reigns. Her claim that students are told to refer other sources to gain information about recent history is encouraging, but judging from the striking lack of knowledge that was displayed by the youth in this study regarding the causes of the conflict, it seems that this advice is seldom followed by students.

### 6.3.3. Views of other academics

Three academics vehemently agreed with the criticism that sensitive issues are not properly discussed in the curriculum and believed that students should indeed be given the opportunity to learn about them. Prof. Siriweera however, held that while colonial and postcolonial history should be taught, all sensitive instances where ethnic prejudices arise should not be included since students from grade 6 to 11 are too young to understand them. Meanwhile, Dr. Dewasiri did not take a definite stance on the matter, asserting that,

... it's quite a complicated issue. I think... I mean... so you have to find a way... you know... the educationists, historians and other people... so they have to discuss... you know... how to teach history in this kind of ethnically divided country.

(Dr. Dewasiri, a Sinhalese-Buddhist academic)

Dr. Wijesinghe stressed that sensitive matters, particularly those which led to the war, should be written into the syllabus in a systematic, diplomatic and unbiased manner. She believed that learning about past relationships between the different ethnic groups could affect the way students see each other. Thus, she held that care should be taken to not damage ethnic harmony when discussing such contentious issues.

Agreeing with this point, Prof. Siriweera stated,

So those must be very carefully brought out, you know. Now writing books and all this must be in the hands of a very competent, objective historians.

(Prof. Siriweera, a Sinhalese-Buddhist academic)

Unfortunately, he noted that the textbooks and Teacher's Guides are sometimes written by incompetent people. Dr. Dewasiri added that the way some of these matters have been written so far, Sinhalese are taught to blame Tamils and vice versa. As he explained,

... how to handle that... those issues... at the level of school education is an extremely sensitive issue, right? So therefore, you need a discussion. But our education establishment has no idea.

He added that,

Sri Lanka still hasn't devised a situation/mechanism or proper way to teach history in this... in the context of this conflict. So, that is one of the biggest issues.

When asked if he thinks that this issue will be addressed in the near future, he offered a negative response, asserting that there is no political will to do so from any part of the establishment. Although certain intellectuals are seriously considering these matters, he maintained that they have no control over the relevant institutions. Taking the NIE as an example, he claimed that it was run according to "vested interests and narrow agendas".

## 6.4. Theoretical perspectives and related research<sup>76</sup>

Despite its ability to influence mindsets and values, history education is generally an underused component of the social recovery process in countries emerging from conflict (Cole and Barsalou, 2006). This is likely due to the fact that history education in most nations tends to largely focus on the ancient past which is so far removed from contemporary society that it can be safely handled in the classroom. In the words of Levstik and Barton (2011, p. 1), "Too often history instruction is simply a march through time that never quite connects to the present." However, for history teaching to pursue its true potential as a reconciliatory tool it needs to engage more with modern history (McCully, 2012).

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<sup>76</sup> This section is also largely adapted from the author's previous publication mentioned in footnote 70.

Teaching contentious matters through history could influence perceptions of one's own group as well as other groups, since identity is intricately connected to the portrayal of a group's past (Cole, 2007b). This is particularly applicable to societies recovering from conflict, as "The combination of countering prejudicial stereotypes with recognition of a group's own responsibility for certain aspects of the conflict may provide for new perspectives and better understanding of the other side in a way that could contribute to resolution" (Barkan, 2005, p. 230). The acknowledgement made by several Sinhalese youth regarding the deprivation of Tamil rights by the Sinhalese majority government is a manifestation of Barkan's argument. The response of a Sinhalese youth named Akvan discussed in section 6.2 is a perfect example since he spoke of minorities being side-lined while the majority was given special treatment. His display of condemnation supports Barton and Levstik's (2004) argument about the importance of the moral response stance in history education. According to the pair, condemnation, which is one manifestation of the stance, plays a role in instilling a sense of justice in young people, upon hearing of past acts which marginalised, oppressed and victimised certain groups in society. Contrary to Cole's (2007b) point mentioned above, this respondent's reaction also shows that learning about the role played by one's ethnic or religious group in the past does not necessarily alter one's opinion of the said group in the present; since within the same interview Akvan embraced his identity, saying, "I'm happy to be a Sinhalese-Buddhist in Sri Lanka." While he accepted that 'his people' so to speak, had behaved badly at certain points in history, he did not seem to think that those past mistakes defined who they were. This type of mature reaction weakens arguments such as the need to promote a 'useable past' through history instruction at the school level (Fullinwider, 1996) and the difficulty in balancing nationalism and patriotism when teaching history (Cole, 2007b).

Furthermore, the many factually bare anecdotes which youth presented as explanations for the breakout of the war, prove that misinformation is spreading within and across communities. This brings to mind the need to "reduce the number of lies that can be circulated unchallenged in public discourse," (Ignatieff, 1998, p. 173 cited in Cole, 2007b, p. 119) which according to Cole, should be addressed not only through truth commissions but through history education as well. The validity of this point stems from the prime position held by formal education among the various means through which knowledge of the past is transmitted to the younger generation. As previously discussed, 78 out of the total sample of 81 youth who were interviewed in this study confirmed that school was the main source through which they learned history, with media and parents being secondary influences. In a similar study conducted by



Conway (2006) in Oxford in England and Mid Ulster in Northern Ireland it was found that although students gained historical insights through multiple avenues, they were influenced most by the history lessons taught in school. Conway's respondents in Oxford agreed that compared to anything else, public perceptions of present day issues were most effectively challenged through history education. Referring to the prevalence of historical myths in Northern Irish communities, Conway states that despite how vivid they are, school history can be much more effective in countering them than it is given credit for. If this argument is applied to the Sri Lankan case, teaching youth about sensitive matters in recent history could go a long way in addressing the significant lack of historical knowledge and related spread of misinformation that is rampant in the local community.

Conway's (2006) research with educators showed that a majority of teachers from Mid Ulster advocated the teaching of contentious matters through the discipline of history, believing it to be useful in easing communal conflicts. Similarly, nine out of the 12 teachers in the Sri Lankan study felt that such matters, most of which are connected to ethnic issues, need to be explained to the students. However, those who disagreed did so based on the presumption that ethnic tensions would be exacerbated through the teaching of sensitive matters. Freedman et al. (2008) discuss similar concerns put forth by some teachers in Rwanda who supported the government's stance that the discussion of historical matters relating to ethnicity would rekindle tensions between different communities. While this is a legitimate concern, the risk of it occurring needs to be weighed against the consequences of withholding information about difficult events. Based on the empirical evidence, the ignorance displayed by youth regarding significant events in their country's past, could be considered as a main consequence in the Sri Lankan case. It remains to be seen whether this general ignorance is in some way connected to the active role played by youth in propagating religious and ethnic intolerance in recent times.

Moreover, Hess's argument about the possibility of the objectivity of teachers' sometimes being compromised due to their personal inclinations appears to be validated with respect to some of the teachers interviewed in the study, particularly those from the Mullaitivu district. That is, the Tamil teachers from Mullaitivu, who, like their students, also emerged from a war-torn community, admitted to warning students that the history lessons laid out in the textbooks may not be accurate or comprehensive. Issuing such warnings is unlikely to be a good method

of handling difficult subject matter, since it could erode student confidence in the content of formal education.

Nevertheless, the findings of another study conducted among young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Northern Ireland by Magill, Smith and Hamber (2009) titled *The Role of Education in Reconciliation*, support the teaching of sensitive issues, particularly those related to conflicts, within school. Two of the main recommendations that emerged from the study in relation to the past conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Northern Ireland were that “Education needs to explicitly address the recent past” and “Education needs to help young people understand why the conflict happened from a range of perspectives” (Magill, Smith and Hamber, 2009, pp. 107–108). The research further revealed that,

...young people do not want the past to be ignored, nor do they want to dwell on negative aspects of the past. Instead, they want to understand what happened and why, and how to create a more positive future. (Magill, Smith and Hamber, 2009, p. 107)

While a few respondents in the present study, particularly some of the Muslim youth, demonstrated a reluctance to discuss ethnic issues, many others seemed to share the views presented above. Struggling to explain the causes of the conflict, they attributed the difficulty to the fact that they were not taught about them in school.

## Conclusion

Having identified the most salient ethnically sensitive matters that impeded the Sri Lankan nation building exercise in the recent past and led to the outbreak of the civil war, the first section of this chapter also revealed how these matters are dealt with within the secondary school history textbooks. While some are completely omitted from the history lessons, the others are narrated through a majoritarian perspective or glossed over by leaving out key pieces of information in their descriptions. As such, it can be argued that the books contain a state approved official narrative of the past which is presented in a manner that leads the reader to accept it as pure fact, leaving no room for interpretation.

In terms of the interview data, it was clear that youth from all ethnic groups and different geographical regions in the country displayed an incapacity to explain the causes of the violent ethnic conflict that disrupted their lives for many years. This lack of knowledge led some young

people to provide extremely simplistic and shallow responses to the question regarding the breakdown of ethnic relations. Although they did not have a deep understanding of the issues, many others however, held mature and balanced views about the country's troubled past. The youth data also revealed the prevalence of factually questionable stories regarding the origins of the conflict which are passed around among communities and transmitted to the younger generation. These findings appear to support much of the literature that favours teaching youth about contentious matters in history, and contradict many of the arguments that discourage doing so.

Interviews with the other educational stakeholders generated mixed views. A majority of teachers believed that students should indeed be taught about the factors which led to the war, but they cautioned that it should be done in a manner that does not promote racism and discrimination. With respect to the content creators, only the two non-Sinhalese-Buddhist writers out of the six-member respondent group agreed with the criticism that sensitive matters are omitted from the history syllabus. The remaining four held that these matters are in fact discussed in the textbooks, albeit lightly, so as to prevent the emergence of ethnic tensions. The other academics were generally in favour of including contentious matters into the history curriculum, but their apparent lack of faith in the institutions responsible for the task led them to believe that the outlook in terms of developing a mechanism to deal with sensitive matters through history education in post-war Sri Lanka, was not promising.

# 7. Conclusion

## 7.1. Summary of findings

Motivated by the overall objective of promoting reconciliation through education, this thesis set out to investigate how the goal of nation building is being pursued through history education in Sri Lanka. In doing so, it focused on three research questions. This section is organised according to the data chapters of the thesis, which in turn strived to answer those three research questions.

### 7.1.1. History education and the ambiguity of the ‘Sri Lankan nation’

To begin with, the practice of pursuing nation building as a goal of education, particularly through the teaching of history, was advocated by a majority of the educational suppliers involved in the study, namely history teachers, content creators and other academics. Adhering to the common assertion found in the literature that history curricula are used to foster national identity (Stearns, Seixas and Wineburg, 2000; Conway, 2006; Torsti, 2007), these educational stakeholders took nation building to mean the construction of the Sri Lankan identity. Some of them further expanded its definition to include the instilling of national love and pride among students.

However, an investigation of how nation building through history education takes place in reality and the influences it is exposed to, revealed that the task is not as straightforward as it appears to be. With respect to the Sri Lankan case, it was found that certain prominent individuals involved in the formation of the history curriculum were conflicted about the composition of the nation they are attempting to build, and this discord has filtered in to the textbooks produced by them, thereby creating an ambiguity regarding the ‘Sri Lankan nation’. This ambiguity is related to the question of who belongs to the nation, since Sinhalese-Buddhists seem to be the sole occupants for the most part, except for a few occasions where the minorities are casually brought within the Sri Lankan umbrella. The interchangeable use of the terms ‘Sri Lankan’ and ‘Sinhalese’ throughout the textbooks and the past leaders of the country being referred to as ‘Sri Lankan rulers’ and ‘Sinhalese kings’ within the same stories – points brought up by Gaul (2015) and corroborated through the current study – are some of the manifestations of the haziness surrounding the Sri Lankan national identity that is being

promoted through the history curriculum. Drawing parallels between these textbook findings and the conflicted views of history content creators who produce the textbooks, is one of the unique contributions made by this thesis.

Another important contribution made to our understanding of Sri Lankan education and identity politics, is the finding that the national and ethnic identification patterns of youth in certain parts of the country tend to mirror the trends displayed through history education. This was visible with respect to the purely Sinhalese-Buddhist cohort from Matara, where 45 percent of respondents named their ethnicity when asked what they considered their nationality to be. Thus, the substitution of their nationality with their ethnicity could indicate that these youth equate being Sri Lankan to being Sinhalese, similar to the trend displayed in the history textbooks. Likewise, the predominantly Tamil cohort from Mullaitivu exhibited a relatively weak Sri Lankan identity, with only 32 percent of the group naming 'Sri Lankan' as their nationality. The rest showed a tendency of substituting their nationality with their ethnicity. It can be argued that this tendency is reflective of the sense of exclusion created by conflating the Sri Lankan identity with the Sinhalese-Buddhist identity within the history curriculum.

Furthermore, this exclusive national identity which is perpetuated through the history textbooks, was reminiscent of Greaney's (2006) concept of 'narrow nationalism', which is one of the eight criteria used by him to identify nationalistic educational material. The study revealed that the textbooks do indeed foster an unquestioning love for the Sinhalese-Buddhist nation. The notion of 'us and them' discussed by Triandafyllidou (1998), which is based on a bond that those who are believed to be ancestrally related share (Connor, 1993), is another factor that made regular appearances throughout the interviews with certain Sinhalese-Buddhist members of the history content development teams. Their influence on the material they produce was once again visible, since an analysis of the textbooks confirmed that the answer to the question of whose perspective the history curriculum and textbooks are written in, was clearly that of the Sinhalese-Buddhist majority.

The assertion put forward by Triandafyllidou (1998) that the nation is defined by the existence of 'significant others' who are perceived to threaten its distinctiveness and independence was also applicable to certain findings that emerged from the study. The claim made by two influential history content creators of discrimination against the Sinhalese majority within the

current Sri Lankan society for instance, highlighted the insecurity they feel in relation to other groups. It also raised the question of whether this insecurity has been reflected through an overcompensation in terms of the magnitude of Sinhalese-Buddhist history contained in the curriculum, as a mechanism of offsetting any perceived discrimination against the majority.

Finally, the exercise of nation building through history education in Sri Lanka seemed to support Mylonas, Lawrence and Chenoweth's (2000) proposition that nation building involves the creation of majorities, due to the conflation of the Sri Lankan and Sinhalese-Buddhist nations. Thus, the answer to the first research question of this thesis regarding what type of nation is being built through history education, could be expressed as 'the Sinhalese-Buddhist nation under the guise of the Sri Lankan nation.'

### 7.1.2. The recognition of diversity through history education

When investigating how the different ethnic groups that constitute the Sri Lankan nation are represented through history education, several salient points came out through the analysis of textbooks. For starters, it was found that the highly contested Aryan myth, which is generally believed to explain the origins of the Sinhalese ethnic group, is clung to within the textbooks, despite the brief acknowledgement that it is only one of the possible theories regarding the establishment of settlements in Sri Lanka. The origins of Tamils and Muslims are not explicitly discussed in the books, although by narrating the story through the perspective of the Sinhalese-Buddhist community, Tamils are sometimes portrayed as South Indian invaders. This finding verified similar assertions made by Gaul (2014), as did the next observation regarding the role of Buddhism. Within the history curriculum Buddhism is given the supreme position among religions, with the protection and promotion of it at all costs being transmitted as an important value that needs to be instilled among the youth of the nation. A clear imbalance in the amount of information presented about the Sinhalese-Buddhist majority compared to the minorities is also visible in the textbooks, with Tamils and Muslims being portrayed as outsiders.

These findings related to the prominence of Buddhism and the lack of minority history exemplified more of Greaney's (2006) factors of identifying nationalistic historical narratives, namely religious bias and omission. The use of overly flattering adjectives to describe Sinhalese rulers demonstrated another criterium mentioned by him - the adoption of persuasive techniques which serve to create distinct images of certain groups.

With regard to the views of youth participants on the representation of diversity through history education, while 64 percent of the total group explicitly mentioned that there is a predominance of Sinhalese history within the curriculum, this figure would be even higher if it included those who implied the same sentiment through their comments on the images of the different ethnic groups that emerge from the textbooks. Several of their opinions bore considerable relevance to some of the ideas that were expressed in the literature. Lall's (2008) theory of national identity formation for instance, which follows a pattern of viewing the 'other' as inferior, applied to some of the comments made by certain respondents from Mullaitivu who held that Tamils are portrayed as being 'lower' than the Sinhalese. The normalisation of the position of the dominant group and 'others' in the textbooks (Naseem, Arshad-Ayaz and Rodríguez, 2016), is another idea that came out of the youth data, with a few participants from Colombo explaining how the Sinhalese community are represented as the true Sri Lankans while Tamils and Muslims are cast as outsiders within the national narrative. Furthermore, the criticisms made by many of the Mullaitivu cohort regarding the excessive focus on Sinhalese kings in the history textbooks, seemed to confirm the suspicion voiced in the literature review that some of the findings of the studies done on Sri Lankan history textbooks in the past such as that by Rasanayagam and Palaniyappan (1999 cited in Wickrema and Colenso, 2003), are still applicable to the revised books.

One of the most significant findings regarding the representation of ethnic groups was that the two minority youth cohorts, i.e. the Tamils from Mullaitivu and Muslims from Ampara, displayed very different reactions towards the discussion of ethnic and religious matters relating to history education. The Tamil youth from the North were far more vocal than their Muslim counterparts in the East, about their dissatisfaction regarding the biased portrayal of ethnic groups within the curriculum. In fact, the highest ratio of those who stated that Sinhalese history dominated the curriculum belonged to the Mullaitivu group, whose answers contained an underlying sense of animosity. Compared to the other districts where at least one participant defended the imbalance in historical representations, no one from Mullaitivu offered such a justification. Even with regard to the stone inscription of King Nissankamalla that was discussed in the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter, the Tamil respondents from Mullaitivu were far more outspoken than the rest, freely using terms like 'racist' and 'discriminative' to get their point across.

The Muslim minority youth from Ampara on the other hand displayed a reluctance to discuss ethnic matters, often offering simplistic, noncommittal responses. The recent communal tensions that have been re-directed from the Tamils towards the Muslims following the end of the civil war could be a possible reason for this reluctance. Their behaviour also bore a resemblance to the concept of 'adaptive preferences' (Watts, Comim and Ridley, 2008), since it raised the question of whether the expectations of these youth regarding what it means to be a Sri Lankan national have been adapted to reflect their assigned status in society. The reason for asking this question is because of some of the comparatively different findings that came out of the Ampara district. Only 45 percent of participants from this cohort stated that the history curriculum focused mainly on Sinhalese history. The same ratio exceeded 50 percent in all the other districts. Moreover, 62 percent of respondents who maintained the objectively falsifiable claim that all the ethnic groups were equally represented in the textbooks were from the Ampara group. Additionally, according to the nationality data discussed in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter, the Sri Lankan identity was strongest in the predominantly Muslim Ampara district, with 75 percent of respondents mentioning 'Sri Lankan' as their nationality. Thus, it appeared that Muslim youth from the East seemed to be in denial about certain types of discrimination faced by their ethnic group, and the fact that despite this discrimination they still predominantly chose to be identified as Sri Lankans, may indicate that their expectations of what it means to be a Sri Lankan could be lower than that of the other ethnic groups.

While the purely Sinhalese-Buddhist youth cohort from Matara did not open themselves up to allegations of racism or extremism through their responses, many of them did display majoritarian perspectives towards the diversity that characterises the nation. The highest ratio of participants who justified the imbalance of Sinhalese history compared to minority history belonged to this Matara cohort, which also had the highest ratio of those who believed that the amount of history taught about each ethnic group was sufficient. With respect to King Nissankamalla's statement that only a Buddhist is entitled to the throne, the highest number of responses which favoured it were received from this group, with many opinions being based on a value that may have been inherited from the textbooks - the need to protect and promote Buddhism.

From the group of teachers interviewed in the study, 83 percent maintained that Sinhalese history dominated the curriculum. In line with Amin's (2014) view that the misrepresentation



of an identity could have adverse consequences on the development of an individual, some of them also spoke of the impact that the lack and misrepresentation of minority history has on youth, particularly those of the Tamil community. Out of the six content creators involved in the study, three of them agreed with the general opinion that the history curriculum focuses more on Sinhalese history compared to that of the minorities, while the three others, who happened to be Sinhalese-Buddhists, disagreed, insisting that the curriculum contained a balanced representation of the history of all the ethnic groups in Sri Lanka. Those who agreed with the premise blamed the lack of minority history on the use of the *Mahavamsa* as the main source of historical information, and they explained that the misrepresentation problem is compounded by translation issues.

The preceding discussion has helped to answer the second research question of this thesis, which investigated how the ethnic and religious diversity which characterises the Sri Lankan nation is being dealt with through history education. The textbook analysis and interview data together showed that the minorities are largely side-lined, with their ethnic origins, religions and past leaders not being paid sufficient attention. It was also discovered that this biased historical storytelling seemed to affect the two groups of minority youth in different ways, as evident by the contrasting reactions they exhibited.

### 7.1.3. The handling of sensitive matters in modern Sri Lankan history

This chapter began by identifying some of the most salient ethnically sensitive issues that impeded the Sri Lankan nation building exercise in the recent past and led to the break out of the civil war. The manner in which these issues are discussed within the history textbooks was then looked at. It was found that while some issues are completely omitted from the history lessons, the others are narrated through a majoritarian perspective or glossed over by leaving out key pieces of information in their descriptions. As such, it can be argued that the books contain a state approved official narrative of the past which is presented in a manner that leads the reader to accept it as pure fact, leaving no room for interpretation.

When questioned as to what they thought caused the breakdown of ethnic relations, youth from all four districts displayed an incapacity to provide sound explanations. Even among the Tamil youth from Mullaitivu – a district which was directly affected by violence and destruction throughout the conflict – only 37 percent were aware of any of the salient issues mentioned

above. This lack of knowledge caused the tendency to provide extremely basic and superficial responses to the serious and complex question regarding the factors that led to the ethnic conflict. Given that the average age of the total group was 20, it was surprising to have received such simplistic answers, which were at times limited to a word or two. Moreover, many of the responses which delved slightly deeper, were riddled with factual inconsistencies that appeared to stem from unreliable and incomplete sources of information.

Another trend that was discovered in the youth data was the tendency to provide a variety of factually bare anecdotes as explanations for the origin of ethnic problems. These outlandish suggestions offered by the youth are a testament to the power of folk history in shaping ideas and beliefs, as well as to the spread of misinformation within communities. According to Cole (2007b) history education should play an important role in countering the circulation of false information. The validity of this point stems from the prime position held by formal education among the various means through which knowledge of the past is transmitted to the younger generation. In fact, 96 percent of youth interviewed in the study confirmed that school was the main source through which they learned history, with media and parents being secondary influences. This finding resembled that of a similar study conducted by Conway (2006) in Oxford in England and Mid Ulster in Northern Ireland, where it was found that although students gained historical insights through multiple avenues, they were influenced most by the history lessons taught in school. Referring to the prevalence of historical myths in Northern Irish communities, Conway held that despite how vivid they are, school history can be much more effective in countering them than it is given credit for. Thus, if the same argument was applied to the Sri Lankan case, teaching youth about sensitive issues in recent history could go a long way in addressing the significant lack of historical knowledge and related spread of misinformation that is rampant in the local community.

Although they did not have a deep understanding of the nuanced nature of Sri Lanka's history, many youth however, held mature and balanced views about the country's troubled past. Deviating somewhat from Cole's (2007b) point that teaching contentious matters through history could influence perceptions of one's own group as well as other groups since identity is intricately connected to the portrayal of a group's past, many Sinhalese youth displayed the capacity to acknowledge the misdeeds of their ancestors without letting it affect the current attachment they felt towards their ethnic group. This validated the assertion that the gaining of

new perspectives regarding past controversies may help groups to understand each other better by countering existing prejudices and dividing up the responsibility for the mistakes made (Barkan, 2005). Furthermore, several minority youth too showed a willingness to condemn the demands of the Tamil separatists and their use of violence. These displays of condemnation supported Barton and Levstik's (2004) argument about the importance of the moral response stance in history education. According to the pair, condemnation, which is one manifestation of the stance, plays a role in instilling a sense of justice in young people, upon hearing of past acts which marginalised, oppressed and victimised certain groups in society. Whichever side of the divide they may be on, these findings demonstrated the ability of many youth to handle sensitive matters in a mature fashion. In doing so, it weakened arguments which discouraged the teaching of contentious issues in school, such as the need to promote a 'useable past' through history instruction at the school level (Fullinwider, 1996) and the difficulty in balancing nationalism and patriotism when teaching history (Cole, 2007b); and strengthened arguments which favoured the practice.

Interviews with the other educational stakeholders however, generated mixed views on the subject. Nine out of the 12 teachers in the Sri Lankan study felt that such ethnically sensitive matters need to be explained to the students. However, those who disagreed did so based on the presumption that ethnic tensions would be exacerbated through the teaching of sensitive issues. This was reminiscent of the Rwandan experience, where some teachers supported the government's stance that the discussion of historical matters relating to ethnicity would rekindle tensions between different communities (Freedman *et al.*, 2008). While this is a legitimate concern, the risk of it occurring needs to be weighed against the consequences of withholding information about difficult issues. Based on the empirical evidence, the ignorance displayed by youth regarding significant events in their country's past, could be considered as a main consequence in the Sri Lankan case. It remains to be seen whether this general ignorance is in some way connected to the active role played by youth in propagating religious and ethnic intolerance in recent times. Moreover, Hess's argument about the possibility of the objectivity of teachers' sometimes being compromised due to their personal inclinations appeared to be validated with respect to some of the teachers interviewed in the study, particularly those from the Mullaitivu district. That is, the Tamil teachers from Mullaitivu, who, like their students, also emerged from a war-torn community, admitted to warning students that the history lessons laid out in the textbooks may not be accurate or comprehensive. Issuing such warnings is

unlikely to be a good method of handling difficult subject matter, since it could erode student confidence in the content of formal education.

The criticism that sensitive matters are either ignored or glossed over within the history curriculum was only accepted by the two non-Sinhalese-Buddhist participants of the six-member respondent group of content creators. The remaining four argued that these issues are in fact discussed in the textbooks, albeit lightly, so as to prevent the emergence of ethnic tensions. The other academics were generally in favour of including contentious matters into the history curriculum, but they were not optimistic about the chances of this being effectively carried out by the institutions responsible for the task.

The third research question of this thesis inquired how Sri Lankan youth are being aided in understanding the sensitive matters which impeded the nation building exercise in the recent past and resulted in the break out of the ethnic conflict. Based on these findings, it can be argued that they are not provided with much support in building such an understanding since most of the sensitive matters in question are either completely left out or glossed over within the history curriculum. Even the ones that do make an appearance were found to be narrated through a majoritarian perspective, leaving no room for interpretation or critical analysis. As such, the glaring lack of awareness that appeared to exist among youth regarding the contentious matters that led to the war which ravaged much of their childhoods, was not entirely unexpected.

## 7.2. Overall implications of the results

The findings discussed above which served to answer the three main research questions of this thesis, shed light on some of the key issues relating to history education in Sri Lanka. What these issues indicate is that although there was a wide acceptance among educational providers regarding the importance of pursuing nation building as a goal of education, the way it is being carried out in reality is quite problematic. Looking at the implications of these issues would be useful not just for Sri Lanka, but also for other plural societies recovering from conflict.

The first problem was the discernible challenge of maintaining a consistent image of the Sri Lankan nation and its corresponding national identity within the history curriculum and textbooks. This was because of the confusion that is created regarding the composition of the

Sri Lankan nation, with it constantly oscillating between a monocultural and multicultural character. It was found that this confusion can be traced back to the views of certain highly influential academics who are involved in the preparation of the curriculum and writing of the textbooks. They themselves appeared to be conflicted about whether it is the diverse Sri Lankan nation or purely Sinhalese-Buddhist nation that they are attempting to build through history instruction. Possible evidence of the effects of this ambiguity surrounding the composition of the nation was visible through the analysis of the nationality data of youth, where the trend of substituting one's nationality with one's ethnicity was common. The most obvious implication of this problem is that it impedes the desired establishment of a strong Sri Lankan identity, which is the main purpose of the nation building exercise. Therefore, it is worth looking into potential measures to address this issue such as requiring those involved in providing history education to undergo sensitivity training in order to identify their inherent biases and making ethnic considerations when selecting members to join the curriculum development and textbook writing teams.

Furthermore, the study revealed that there is a severe imbalance in the amount of minority history that is presented in the curriculum, with the ethnic origins, past rulers etc. of the Tamil and Muslim groups not being paid sufficient attention. It was also found that the minorities are portrayed as outsiders within the national narrative, which appeared to be written in the perspective of the Sinhalese-Buddhist majority. In addition, the analysis of textbooks showed that Buddhism is given prominence over all other religions, with the protection and promotion of it at all costs being projected as an important value that needs to be instilled in the younger generation. These issues hamper the recognition of cultural diversity in Sri Lanka's plural society, which forms the second part of the national goal relating to nation building.

The data findings showed that the misrecognition of their identity impacted the sense of belonging of minority youth in differing ways. Tamil youth from the North were vocal about the fact that they resented being excluded from the national story and being cast in a negative light. Judging from past experience, such feelings of animosity among those who belong to the largest minority in the country, could develop into intentions of separatism over time. Meanwhile, Muslim youth from the East exhibited a preference to steer clear of ethnic matters, displaying a desire to belong to the nation even if it meant being resigned to the fact that they would not receive the same treatment as the majority. However, a continuation of the current

ethnic and religious violence in the country that is being directed towards the Muslim population, may eventually end their resignation and trigger a reaction. With respect to youth from the Sinhalese-Buddhist majority, the value of safeguarding Buddhism at all costs appeared to have resonated with many of them. While this is perfectly acceptable for the most part, the current state of affairs relating to religious violence in the country points towards the slight possibility that the vigorous promotion of this value through history education and the lack of clarification that it should not be achieved through the use of force, could trigger extremist tendencies among certain youth. As such, it is important to consider these potential outcomes of misrepresenting diversity through history teaching and take proactive steps to prevent identity markers such as ethnicity and religion from generating conflict through education.

Although a popular opinion that emerged from the participant data was the importance of learning from the past in order to build a successful future for the nation, it was discovered that the recent past is not dealt with effectively through history education. This is because the ethnically sensitive issues which impeded the nation building exercise and led to the break out of the war are omitted, glossed over or simply narrated through a majoritarian perspective within the state approved official narrative which is presented through history education. The result of this, which was evident through the interview data, is the creation of a younger generation who are largely unaware of the significant issues and defining moments that characterise their nation's past. Given that past troubles are often intricately connected to contemporary issues, this ignorance can have serious consequences, as is already becoming apparent through the involvement of youth in the spread of violence and hate that is impeding reconciliation in post-war Sri Lanka. Therefore, there is an urgent need to devise a mechanism of educating youth about the contentious matters that shaped the nation into what it is today.<sup>77</sup>

### 7.3. Directions for future research

Apart from adding to the knowledge base on education and identity politics, the findings of this thesis generated valuable insights and suggestions for further research. In a multicultural

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<sup>77</sup> According to a recent newspaper article, President Maithreepala Sirisena convened a meeting of retired and serving military leaders and government ministers on 6 August 2018 to plan and execute the recording of the history of the war (Ayub, 2018). Although there is varied speculation about the President's intentions for doing so, this can nevertheless be considered as a positive step in relation to dealing with the country's difficult past and eventually educating the younger generation about it.

country like Sri Lanka, research on how education disregards diversity, particularly through the teaching of history, tends to view its impact on all minorities grouped together, or else only on the largest minority. However, the differing reactions displayed by Northern Tamils and Eastern Muslims interviewed in the study highlight the importance of recognising each minority group as a separate entity when considering the impact that biased education could have on it. In terms of the current study, it is also useful to expand the research to other parts of the country to identify the role that regional factors play in explaining ethnicity-based differences in youth attitudes, as well as to improve the generalisability of the results. Moreover, it is important to understand the ethno-religious identities that are prominent in Sri Lanka when conducting similar research, in order to ensure that smaller minorities such as Sinhalese-Christians do not get subsumed under larger identity groups.

The global discourse on nation building through education rarely makes a distinction between secular and non-secular multicultural countries when dealing with the topic of diversity. This is an aspect that needs to be addressed, since the task becomes relatively more complicated in the case of non-secular plural societies. Taking Sri Lanka as an example, although it is seen as a multi-religious nation, the constitution states that Buddhism shall be given “the foremost place” (‘The constitution of the democratic socialist republic of Sri Lanka’, 2015, p. 3). As such, when it comes to formal education, apart from the subject of religion, Buddhism is given a prime position even within other subjects such as history. The constitutional backing it receives makes this practice difficult to criticise, although it is not conducive towards the construction of a cohesive Sri Lankan identity. Thus, future work in this field should distinguish the complexities of using education for nation building in non-secular plural societies.

Another trend that is visible in the global literature regarding history education in diverse societies, is the relatively larger focus on history teachers compared to those involved in the development of the curriculum and other educational materials. There is a considerable body of primary research that has been carried out among teachers, and issues relating to teachers being influenced by their surroundings, particularly in plural conflict-ridden societies, are heavily documented. However, the same cannot be said about other educational providers such as curriculum developers and textbook writers. This is a concern that requires attention, given the high dependence that teachers place on educational materials, particularly in developing

countries. In other words, the producers of knowledge warrant as much attention as the conveyors of knowledge within the history education context, since the fundamentals of the discipline such as perspective and values are determined by them. The striking observations relating to inherent bias that emerged from the interviews with content creators in this study further support the argument that just like on teachers, greater focus needs to be placed on the other actors involved in the provision of history education.

Furthermore, the rich variety of perspectives that emerged from the youth participants of this study serve as a testament to the importance of giving youth a louder voice in shaping their own futures through education. That is, it advocates conducting more primary research among youth and giving greater consideration to the views obtained through such research within educational decision-making processes. Finding out the opinions of Sri Lankan youth with respect to being taught about the contentious issues in history for instance, is a situation where youth perspectives could be valuable in enhancing the discussion on how post-war societies should deal with their difficult pasts in the classroom. Another interesting area of research in relation to the Sri Lankan context would be to identify youth actors involved in the recent spread of hate and intolerance through social media and try to understand whether their knowledge (or lack thereof) and perceptions of local history are related in any way to their stance on contemporary issues.

Whilst explaining certain avenues through which the current study can be taken forward to benefit the Sri Lankan society, the above discussion also attempted to bring out some valuable insights that could prove useful for all multicultural nations emerging from conflict. It highlighted several points that the literature does not pick up on and elucidated how the findings of this study could be of greater significance to the discourse on education and nation building. By doing so, it is hoped that this thesis served to create a better understanding of the identity politics that affect education in a diverse nation, thereby contributing to the efforts of promoting reconciliation through education and helping to heal some of the scars left by the war on the Sri Lankan society.



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## Glossary

Anagarika Dharmapala	A Sinhalese-Buddhist revivalist and writer who played an active role in the Buddhist revival that took place in Sri Lanka towards the end of the 19 <sup>th</sup> Century.
Burgher	A small minority ethnic group in Sri Lanka. They are descendants of the Portuguese, Dutch and British who settled in the island during the colonial period.
Chola	A kingdom situated close to the east coast of South India. The Cholas established their power in South India after the Pandyan Empire.
G.G. Ponnambalam	A Tamil political leader in the post-independence era. He was a lawyer, politician, cabinet minister and founder of the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC).
Gongalegoda Banda	A Sinhalese leader who played an active role in the independence struggle of 1848.
Gunananda Himi	A Buddhist priest who played an active role in the Buddhist revival that took place in Sri Lanka towards the end of the 19 <sup>th</sup> Century.
Indian Tamils	A minority ethnic group in Sri Lanka. They are descendants of indentured workers brought down by the British in the colonial period to work on tea, coffee and rubber plantations.
J.R. Jayewardene	The second president of Sri Lanka who was in office from 1978 – 1989.
Kalinga Magha	A South Indian who invaded Sri Lanka in 1215 AD, usurped power and ruled the Polonnaruwa kingdom for 21 years.
King Asela	A ruler of the kingdom of Anuradhapura from 215 BC – 205 BC.
King Dathusena	A ruler of the kingdom of Anuradhapura from 455 – 473 AD.
King Devanampiyatissa	A ruler of the kingdom of Anuradhapura from 307 BC – 267 BC. Buddhism was brought to the country during his reign.
King Dutugemunu	A Sinhalese king who reigned from 161 BC – 137 BC. Whilst ruling the Ruhunu kingdom in the South, he defeated the Tamil King Elara who was ruling the Anuradhapura kingdom in the North.
King Elara	A Chola prince from South India who ruled the kingdom of Anuradhapura from 205 BC – 161 BC.
King Kavantissa	A ruler of the kingdom of Ruhuna from 205 BC – 161 BC.
King Keerthi Sri Rajasinha	A Nayakkar dynast who ruled Kandy from 1747 – 1782.
King Mittasena	A ruler of the kingdom of Anuradhapura from 435 – 436 AD.
King Nissankamalla	A Kalinga dynast who ruled the kingdom of Polonnaruwa from 1187 AD – 1196 AD.

King Pandara Vanniyan	The last Tamil king of Sri Lanka who ruled the Vanni region from 1785 – 1803.
King Pandukhabaya	The first ruler of the Anuradhapura kingdom, who reigned from 474 BC – 367 BC.
King Sangiliyan	A ruler of the Jaffna kingdom from 1617 – 1619.
Mahavamsa	A Pali chronicle which traces the legends and history of Sri Lanka from 6 <sup>th</sup> century BC to the 4 <sup>th</sup> century AD.
Muthrasiva	A ruler of the kingdom of Anuradhapura from 367 BC – 307 BC. Son of King Pandukhabaya and father of King Devanampiyatissa.
Prince Vijaya	The first recorded king of Sri Lanka who is believed to have reigned from 543 – 505 BC.
Ravana	In his book <i>Sakvithi Ravana Naluwa</i> , Arisen Ahubudu's claims that Ravana was an ancient king of Sri Lanka who reigned from 2554 BC – 2517 BC. He is a part of the Ramayanaya legend.
Sinhalese	The largest ethnic group in Sri Lanka. They are believed to be descendants of North Indians who arrived in the island in ancient times.
Sri Lankan Moors	The second largest minority in Sri Lanka. They are colloquially referred to as 'Muslims'.
Sri Lankan Tamils	The largest ethnic minority in Sri Lanka. They are believed to be descendants of Dravidians from South India who arrived in the island in ancient times.
Sri Sumangala Himi	A Buddhist priest who played an active role in the independence struggle of 1818.
S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike	The fourth prime minister of Ceylon who was in office from 1956 until his assassination in 1959.
Tamils	A collective reference to both Sri Lankan Tamils and Indian Tamils, or a singular reference to Sri Lankan Tamils alone.
Thomas Maitland	A British national who became the Governor of the maritime provinces in 1805.
Velupillai Prabhakaran	The founder and leader of the LTTE. The Sri Lankan civil war is considered to have officially ended when he was killed by the Sri Lankan Armed forces on 18 May 2018.
Ven. Kadahapola Thero	A Buddhist priest who played an active role in the independence struggle of 1848.



## **Appendices**

## Appendix A

### List of Interview Participants

#### *Youth*

Name	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Religion	District
Aven	Male	19	Sinhala	Buddhist	Matara
Pasangi	Female	19	Sinhala	Buddhist	Matara
Madara	Female	19	Sinhala	Buddhist	Matara
Piyali	Female	19	Sinhala	Buddhist	Matara
Vindya	Female	19	Sinhala	Buddhist	Matara
Hasanthi	Female	20	Sinhala	Buddhist	Matara
Hiranya	Female	20	Sinhala	Buddhist	Matara
Chamika	Female	19	Sinhala	Buddhist	Matara
Nalindrini	Female	19	Sinhala	Buddhist	Matara
Damayanthi	Female	19	Sinhala	Buddhist	Matara
Vishwa	Male	19	Sinhala	Buddhist	Matara
Inoshini	Female	18	Sinhala	Buddhist	Matara
Imanthi	Female	19	Sinhala	Buddhist	Matara
Akvan	Male	19	Sinhala	Buddhist	Matara
Vilakshi	Female	19	Sinhala	Buddhist	Matara
Maheshi	Female	19	Sinhala	Buddhist	Matara
Akushla	Female	19	Sinhala	Buddhist	Matara
Ruvini	Male	20	Sinhala	Buddhist	Matara
Thamindu	Male	20	Sinhala	Buddhist	Matara
Kaya	Female	20	Sinhala	Buddhist	Matara
Kamilia	Female	20	Tamil	Hindu	Mullaitivu
Kaushiyani	Female	20	Tamil	Hindu	Mullaitivu
Niranjana	Male	22	Tamil	Hindu	Mullaitivu
Praveena	Female	20	Tamil	Hindu	Mullaitivu
Sanjana	Female	20	Tamil	Hindu	Mullaitivu
Anita	Female	19	Tamil	Hindu	Mullaitivu
Aranya	Female	19	Tamil	Hindu	Mullaitivu
Maithree	Female	20	Tamil	Hindu	Mullaitivu
Lathika	Female	21	Tamil	Hindu	Mullaitivu
Govinda	Male	21	Tamil	Hindu	Mullaitivu
Sathish	Male	20	Tamil	Hindu	Mullaitivu
Safia	Female	18	Muslim	Islam	Mullaitivu
Thushi	Female	18	Muslim	Islam	Mullaitivu
Mishka	Female	18	Muslim	Islam	Mullaitivu
Danesh	Male	18	Tamil	Hindu	Mullaitivu
Lokesh	Male	24	Tamil	Hindu	Mullaitivu
Arvindi	Female	20	Tamil	Hindu	Mullaitivu
Geetha	Female	21	Tamil	Hindu	Mullaitivu
Diyan	Male	21	Tamil	Christian	Mullaitivu

Zaiqath	Male	20	Muslim	Islam	Ampara
Imran	Male	21	Muslim	Islam	Ampara
Fazry	Male	20	Muslim	Islam	Ampara
Thalal	Male	21	Muslim	Islam	Ampara
Shafraz	Male	21	Muslim	Islam	Ampara
Suranjan	Male	19	Tamil	Hindu	Ampara
Divakar	Male	19	Tamil	Hindu	Ampara
Shoib	Male	22	Muslim	Islam	Ampara
Shubham	Male	22	Muslim	Islam	Ampara
Adnaan	Male	21	Muslim	Islam	Ampara
Arun	Male	21	Muslim	Islam	Ampara
Azmath	Male	18	Muslim	Islam	Ampara
Hafeel	Male	19	Muslim	Islam	Ampara
Mustafa	Male	21	Muslim	Islam	Ampara
Awnee	Male	25	Muslim	Islam	Ampara
Rizah	Male	22	Muslim	Islam	Ampara
Murad	Male	21	Muslim	Islam	Ampara
Saad	Male	21	Muslim	Islam	Ampara
Inshad	Male	22	Muslim	Islam	Ampara
Siraj	Male	22	Muslim	Islam	Ampara
Shamali	Female	23	Sinhala	Buddhist	Colombo
Wasanthi	Female	22	Sinhala	Christian	Colombo
Imesh	Male	22	Sinhala	Buddhist	Colombo
Shehani	Female	20	Sinhala	Buddhist	Colombo
Dinesha	Female	19	Sinhala	Buddhist	Colombo
Thamesha	Female	19	Sinhala	Buddhist	Colombo
Prashan	Male	19	Sinhala	Buddhist	Colombo
Charith	Male	20	Sinhala	Buddhist	Colombo
Gayani	Female	19	Sinhala	Buddhist	Colombo
Ishantha	Female	20	Sinhala	Buddhist	Colombo
Dinusha	Female	20	Sinhala	Buddhist	Colombo
Nayomi	Female	21	Sinhala	Buddhist	Colombo
Anika	Female	24	Burgher	Christian	Colombo
Hashintha	Female	20	Sinhala	Buddhist	Colombo
Hansanie	Female	24	Sinhala	Buddhist	Colombo
Pooja	Female	23	Sinhala	Christian	Colombo
Yasuntha	Female	22	Sinhala	Buddhist	Colombo
Ayudya	Female	21	Sinhala	Buddhist	Colombo
Shivangi	Female	20	Tamil	Hindu	Colombo
Neera	Female	20	Tamil	Hindu	Colombo
Safran	Male	25	Muslim	Islam	Colombo
Aaminah	Female	20	Muslim	Islam	Colombo

### *History teachers*

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Religion	District
Mr. Bathiya	Male	Sinhala	Buddhist	Matara
Ms. Gayathri	Female	Sinhala	Buddhist	Matara
Mr. Jagath	Male	Sinhala	Buddhist	Matara
Mr. Imantha	Male	Sinhala	Buddhist	Matara
Ms. Nalika	Female	Sinhala	Buddhist	Matara
Ms. Lucia	Female	Tamil	Hindu	Mullaitivu
Ms. Saakshi	Female	Tamil	Hindu	Mullaitivu
Mr. Lokesh	Male	Tamil	Hindu	Mullaitivu
Ms. Sadana	Female	Tamil	Hindu	Ampara
Ms. Farisz	Female	Muslim	Islam	Ampara
Mr. Riyal	Male	Muslim	Islam	Ampara
Ms. Azara	Female	Muslim	Islam	Ampara

### *History content creators*

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Religion
Mr. Kularatne	Male	Sinhala	Buddhist
Ms. Dissanayake	Female	Sinhala	Buddhist
Prof. Ediriweera	Female	Sinhala	Buddhist
Ms. Deandra	Female	Tamil	Christian
Mr. Mohamed	Male	Muslim	Islam
Mr. Ariyaratne	Male	Sinhala	Buddhist

### *Other academics*

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Religion
Prof. Siriweera	Male	Sinhala	Buddhist
Dr. Dewasiri	Male	Sinhala	Buddhist
Dr. Wijesinghe	Female	Sinhala	Buddhist
Dr. Jayaweera	Female	Sinhala	Buddhist
Prof. Padmanadan	Male	Tamil	Hindu

## Appendix B

### Semi-Structured Interview Guide - Students

#### A. Personal Details

Name:

Age:

Place of birth:

Ethnicity:

Religion:

#### B. Identity formation

1. How would you describe yourself?  
*Probe - Ask separately about each of the characteristics they mention*
2. If you are asked the question ‘what is your nationality?’ what is the first answer that comes to your mind?  
*Prompt - do you think of yourself first as a Sri Lankan or as a Sinhalese/Tamil/Muslim etc.?*
3. How would you describe the relationship between being a Sri Lankan and being a Sinhalese Buddhist or Christian/Tamil Hindu or Christian/Muslim?
4. What do you consider to be your homeland? Is it the whole island of Sri Lanka or is it a particular place within the country?
5. What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the word nationalism? How would you explain what it is?

#### C. The discipline of history

6. What do you think is the purpose of learning history?
7. What are the ways through which you have learnt about your country’s history and the history of other countries?  
*Prompt – Is it mostly through school or media or parents etc.?*
8. How much of the history that you remember comes from what you have learned in school?
9. What are the lessons or topics that you remember the most or know the most about?

#### D. Ethnicity within history lessons

10. What do you know about the history of your ethnic group (Sinhalese/Tamils/Muslims) in Sri Lanka?  
*Prompt – their origins, what kind of jobs they had, who their leaders were etc.*
11. Where do you think the different ethnic groups first settled in the country and did they migrate to other places later on?

12. How are the different ethnic groups portrayed in the school history curriculum?  
*Prompt –Do you think all groups are described in the same way or do different images of each group emerge from the textbooks? Do you think enough is taught about the history of each group?*
13. In the fourth chapter of your grade 7 history textbook there is mention of a stone inscription of King Nissankamalla I which reads as follows: “Like attempting to plant poisonous trees in a place where there had been wish conferring trees earlier (kapruka), non-Buddhists should not be placed in power in Sri Lanka to which the Kalinga dynasty was the rightful heir.” What is your opinion of this statement?
14. Do you know anything about how the tensions or the problems between Sinhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka first started, and in your opinion what are the causes of the ethnic war that took place in the country for 26 years?

## Appendix C

### Semi-Structured Interview Guide – History Teachers

#### A. Personal Details

Name:

School:

Length of teaching career:

Ethnicity:

Religion:

#### B. The history curriculum

1. In your view what are the goals of teaching history?
2. What do you consider to be the most important lessons/topics in the history curriculum that students need to learn?
3. What is your opinion on how the different ethnic groups are portrayed in the history curriculum?

*Prompt – Do you think all groups are described in the same way or do different images of each group emerge from the textbooks? Do you think enough is taught about the history of each group?*

4. The history curriculum has been criticized by some scholars for glossing over contentious issues in the country's past, particularly those which are considered to be the root causes of the civil war. What is your opinion of this criticism?

*Probe – For example the standardization policy of 1972 is not mentioned under educational changes after independence.*

5. What is your view of nation building through education?

#### C. Pedagogical approach

6. How would you describe the pedagogical approach/teaching method of secondary school history education in Sri Lanka?
7. In the fourth chapter of the grade 7 history textbook there is a mention of a stone inscription of King Nissankamalla I which reads as follows: "Like attempting to plant poisonous trees in a place where there had been wish conferring trees earlier (kapruka), non-Buddhists should not be placed in power in Sri Lanka to which the Kalinga dynasty was the rightful heir." How do you explain and discuss this statement with your students?
8. What are the challenges you face in teaching history in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society and how do you deal with them?

#### **D. Impact**

9. Do you think that history education has an impact on your students' identities?
10. What is your opinion on the impact of ongoing history education in Sri Lanka?  
*Probe – Do you think it is effective?*
11. How would you like to see history education impact your students' lives?
12. Do you think history teaching has the potential to help students to become better citizens?



## Appendix D

### Semi-Structured Interview Guide – History content creators

#### A. Personal Details

Name:

Occupation:

Involvement with history education (overview of role and responsibilities):

Ethnicity:

Religion:

#### B. Curriculum development process

1. Could you please give a brief description of the process involved in developing the secondary school history curriculum and Teachers' Guides?

*Prompt – composition of committee, approval and review process, timeframe etc.*

2. Has this process undergone any changes within the last two decades?

#### C. The history curriculum

3. In your view what are the goals of history teaching?
4. What do you consider to be the most important topics/lessons in the curriculum that students need to learn?
5. What were the difficulties in prioritising different topics/themes in the curriculum?  
Were there any particular issues under dispute?
6. In general, how would you describe the main challenges in designing a history curriculum?
7. How were these challenges addressed by the committee?
8. What is your opinion on how the different ethnic groups are portrayed in the curriculum?  
*Probe - do you think that sufficient attention has been paid to all groups? Does the curriculum give a clear account of the history of all ethnic groups?*
9. In Chapter 4 of the grade 7 history textbook there are some words of advice for students which reads as follows: *"It has to be understood that the responsibility of safeguarding the country, the nation, and the religion will fall on you the younger generation. Accordingly, with a deep love for the country let us protect our heritage."*  
What do you think of this statement?  
*Probe – What is the difference between country and nation here?*
10. What is your view of nation building through education?
11. The history curriculum has been criticised by scholars for glossing over contentious issues in the country's past, particularly those which are considered to be the root causes of the civil war. What is your opinion of this criticism?

*Probe – For example the standardization policy of 1972 is not mentioned under educational changes after independence*

12. Do you think that students can acquire a good understanding of the factors that led to the war through the history curriculum?

#### **D. Pedagogical approach**

13. How would you describe the teaching method of secondary school history education in Sri Lanka?
14. How would you describe the role of the history teacher?
15. What do you think are the challenges that teachers face in teaching history in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country?

#### **E. Impact**

16. What is your opinion on the impact of ongoing history education in Sri Lanka?
- Probe – Do you think it is effective?*
17. How would you like to see history education impact students' lives?

## Appendix E

### Semi-Structured Interview Guide – Academics

#### A. Personal Details

Name:

Affiliated university or institution:

Ethnicity:

Religion:

#### B. Curriculum development process

1. What do you know about the process involved in developing the secondary school history curriculum and Teachers' Guides?

*Prompt – composition of committee, approval and review process, timeframe etc.*

#### C. The history curriculum

2. In your view what are the goals of history teaching?
3. What do you consider to be the most important topics/lessons in the curriculum that students need to learn?
4. What do you think are the difficulties in prioritising different topics/themes in the curriculum?
5. In general, how would you describe the main challenges in designing a history curriculum?
6. How do you think these challenges could be addressed?
7. What is your opinion on how the different ethnic groups are portrayed in the curriculum?

*Probe - do you think that sufficient attention has been paid to all groups? Does the curriculum give a clear account of the history of all ethnic groups?*

8. The history curriculum has been criticised by scholars for glossing over contentious issues in the country's past, particularly those which are considered to be the root causes of the civil war. What is your opinion of this criticism? Do you think such controversial events should be discussed in the curriculum?

*Probe – For example the standardisation policy of 1972 is not mentioned under educational changes after independence*

9. Do you think sufficient attention has been paid to modern/recent history in the curriculum?

*Probe – When do you think information regarding the origins and development of the war will be introduced into the curriculum? Do you have any thoughts on how this should be done?*

10. Nation building has been mentioned as one of the goals of education in the Teachers' Guides. What is your view of nation building through education?

#### **D. Pedagogical approach**

11. How would you describe the pedagogical approach/teaching method of secondary school history education in Sri Lanka?
12. How would you describe the role of the history teacher?
13. What do you think are the challenges that teachers face in teaching history in an ethnically heterogeneous country?

#### **E. Impact**

14. What is your opinion on the impact of ongoing history education in Sri Lanka?  
*Probe – Do you think it is effective?*
15. How would you like to see history education impact students' lives?
16. Do you think history teaching at the school level could have an impact on reconciliation?

## Appendix F

### Informed Consent Form

I would like to invite you to participate in this study. In order to decide if you would like to do so, please read this form which outlines the purpose of the research, what your involvement would entail and your rights as a participant.

#### Information and purpose:

My name is Mihiri Warnasuriya and this study forms part of my PhD research at the University of Cambridge under the supervision of Dr. Shailaja Fennell. My topic looks at the relationship between education policy and youth identity in Sri Lanka, focusing on the subject of history. The purpose of the research is to understand how history teaching at the school level could help citizens to peacefully co-exist in a multicultural society.

#### The process:

The method used for the research is face-to-face interviews. Your participation in the research is completely voluntary and your decision not to participate will not have any negative impacts. If you are willing to participate, the interview will take approximately 30 minutes for youth and teachers and approximately one hour for content creators and academics. The interviews will be audio recorded (with your permission) so as to ensure that the discussion is accurately captured. The tapes will only be heard by me (the researcher) and I am happy to share the transcripts with you, if you wish to see them. There are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in the study.

#### Confidentiality:

Your identity will be anonymised with the use of pseudonyms. The information gathered through the interviews will be used in my final dissertation and any other publications that I may produce relating to this topic. However, it will not be possible to trace any of the answers back to the interview participants since their identities will be protected.

#### As a participant you may:

- Withdraw from the research at any point (in this case any information provided by you will be omitted from the study)
- Decline to answer any questions you do not wish to comment on
- Ask questions about the study at any time during the research process
- Ask for the recorder to be turned off at any point during the interview
- Have access to a summary of the research findings once the project is completed

If you have any other questions or require further information you can contact me on 0773656099 or msw45@cam.ac.uk.

By signing below you agree that you have read and understood the above information, and would be interested in participating in this study.

.....  
Name

.....  
Signature

.....  
Date

# Appendix G

## Examples of code lists

### Code-Filter: All

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HU: Phd Research Study\_04March2016  
File: [C:\Users\Mihiri\Documents\Scientific Software\ATLAS\TextBank\Phd Research Study\_04March2016.hpr7]  
Edited by: Super  
Date/Time: 2017-02-15 14:16:44

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#### Avoiding the promotion of racism/discrimination

##### CAUSES OF ETHNIC CONFLICT

CAUSES\_Education related

CAUSES\_fault of politicians

CAUSES\_Language related

CAUSES\_Legislation related

CAUSES\_Rights/equality related

CAUSES\_separate state

CAUSES\_Unaware

CAUSES\_Vague

Challenges and methods of teaching history

Communal representation

Discriminatory practices

Disenfranchisement of ITs

Ethnic complaints

Favourable position of Tamils

FORM\_Equal representation

FORM\_Issues

FORM\_Political influence

FORM\_Process

FORMULATION OF CURRICULUM

GOALS OF HISTORY TEACHING

GOALS\_Build up present/design future

GOALS\_Compare and develop

GOALS\_Correct mistakes

GOALS\_Learn about ethnic group

Identity formation

INCLUSION OF CONTENTIOUS ISSUES

INCLUSION\_Anti

INCLUSION\_Pro

LAND SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

LAND\_Arrival claims

LAND\_Homeland other

LAND\_Homeland Sri Lanka

LAND\_Muslim East

LAND\_Sinhala South

LAND\_Tamil North

Nation building

NATIONALITY\_Muslim/Tamil Muslim

NATIONALITY\_Sinhalese/Sinhalese Buddhist

NATIONALITY\_Sri Lankan

NATIONALITY\_Sri Lankan Muslim

NATIONALITY\_Sri Lankan Tamil

NATIONALITY\_Tamil

## **New syllabus**

**PED\_Alternative methods**

**PED\_Lecture method**

**PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH**

**PORT\_Equal and/or sufficient**

**PORT\_Insufficient**

**PORT\_Less about Muslims**

**PORT\_Less about Tamils**

**PORT\_More about Sinhalese**

**PORT\_Negative of Muslims**

**PORT\_Negative of Tamils**

**PORT\_Translation issues**

**PORTRAYAL OF ETHNIC GROUPS**

**QUOTE\_Acceptance**

**QUOTE\_Anti racism**

**QUOTE\_Maturity**

**QUOTE\_Well informed**

**SELF DESCRIPTION**

**SELF\_With ethnicity/religion**

**SELF\_Without ethnicity/religion**

**Sinhala Only**

**SOURCES OF HISTORY\_School**

**Standardisation and quota system**

**State-aided colonisation**

**Unhappy with syllabus changes**

**Universal franchise**

## **Code-Filter: All**

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## **Avoiding the promotion of racism/discrimination**

**CAUSES OF ETHNIC CONFLICT**

**CAUSES\_Education related**

**CAUSES\_fault of politicians**

**CAUSES\_Language related**

**CAUSES\_Legislation related**

**CAUSES\_Rights/equality related**

**CAUSES\_separate state**

**CAUSES\_Unaware**

**CAUSES\_Vague**

**CONCEPTS\_Nation building**

**CONCEPTS\_Sinhala Buddhist nation**

**CONCEPTS\_Sri Lankan nation**

**Discriminatory practices**

**Ethnic complaints**

**FORM\_Equal representation**

**FORM\_Issues & challenges**

**FORM\_Political influence**

**FORM\_Process**

**FORM\_Reforms**

**FORMULATION OF CURRICULUM**

## **GOALS OF HISTORY TEACHING**

GOALS\_Build up present/design future

GOALS\_Compare and develop

GOALS\_Correct mistakes

GOALS\_Instill pride about the country

GOALS\_Learn about ethnic group

GOALS\_Learn about past rulers

## **Identity formation**

## **IMPACT OF HISTORY TEACHING**

IMPACT\_Desired

IMPACT\_Real

## **INCLUSION OF CONTENTIOUS ISSUES**

INCLUSION\_Anti

INCLUSION\_Challenges and methods

INCLUSION\_Opinions on disenfranchisement of ITs

INCLUSION\_Opinions on divide and rule

INCLUSION\_Opinions on Sinhala Only Act

INCLUSION\_Opinions on standardization

INCLUSION\_Pro

## **LAND SETTLEMENT PATTERNS**

LAND\_Arrival claims

LAND\_Homeland other

LAND\_Homeland Sri Lanka

LAND\_Muslim East

LAND\_Sinhala South

LAND\_Tamil North

NATIONALITY\_Muslim/Tamil Muslim

NATIONALITY\_Sinhalese/Sinhalese Buddhist

NATIONALITY\_Sri Lankan

NATIONALITY\_Sri Lankan Muslim

NATIONALITY\_Sri Lankan Tamil

NATIONALITY\_Tamil

## **New syllabus**

PED\_Alternative methods

PED\_Challenges and methods of teaching history

PED\_Lecture method

## **PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH**

PORT\_Equal and/or sufficient

PORT\_Insufficient

PORT\_Less about Muslims

PORT\_Less about Tamils

PORT\_More about Sinhalese

PORT\_Negative of Muslims

PORT\_Negative of Tamils

PORT\_Translation issues

## **PORTRAYAL OF ETHNIC GROUPS**

QUOTE\_Acceptance

QUOTE\_Anti racism

QUOTE\_Maturity

QUOTE\_Well informed

## **Reconciliation**

## **SELF DESCRIPTION**

SELF\_With ethnicity/religion

SELF\_Without ethnicity/religion

## **SOURCES OF HISTORY\_School**

TEXT\_Communal representation

TEXT\_Disenfranchisement of ITs

TEXT\_Favourable position of Tamils



TEXT\_Sinhala Only  
TEXT\_Standardisation and quota system  
TEXT\_State-aided colonisation  
TEXT\_Universal franchise  
TEXTBOOK ANALYSIS  
Unhappy with syllabus changes

## Code-Filter: All

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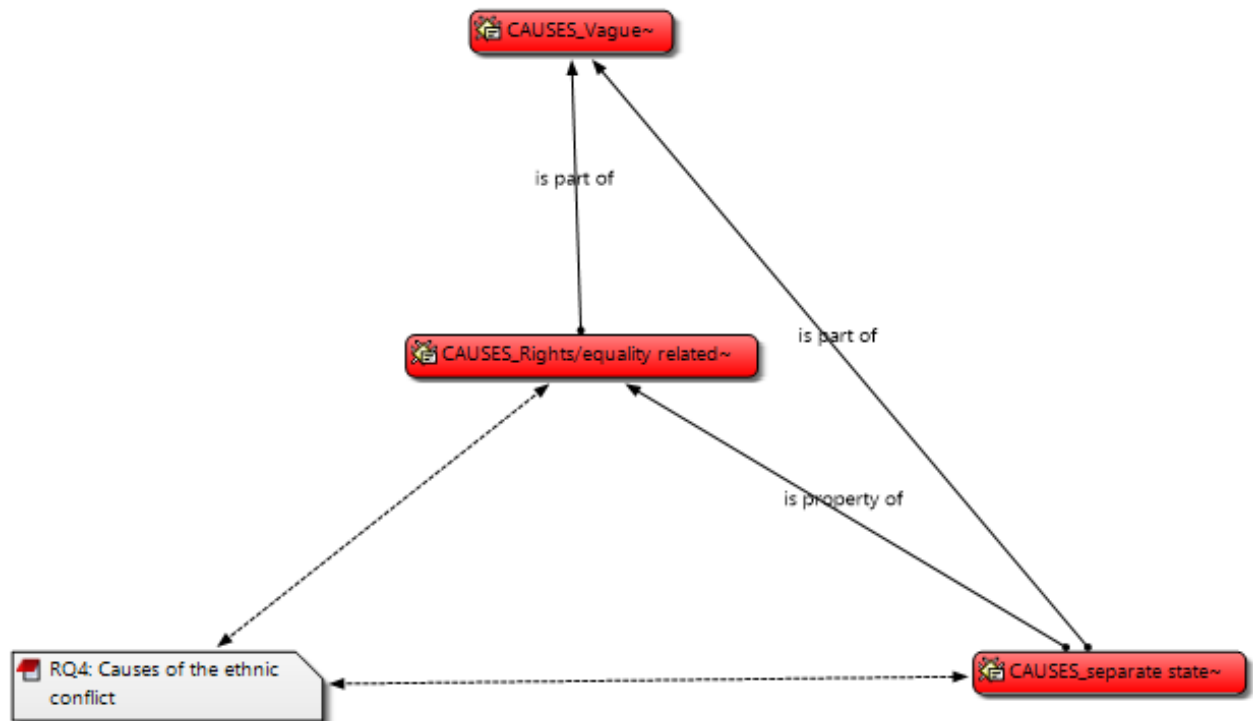
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CAUSES OF ETHNIC CONFLICT  
CAUSES\_Education related  
CAUSES\_Language related  
CAUSES\_Political representation  
CAUSES\_Rights/equality related  
CAUSES\_separate state  
CAUSES\_Unaware  
CAUSES\_Vague  
CONCEPTS\_Ethnic concerns  
CONCEPTS\_Nation building  
CONCEPTS\_Sinhala Buddhist nation  
CONCEPTS\_Sri Lankan nation  
FORM\_Equal representation  
FORM\_Issues & challenges  
FORM\_Process  
FORM\_Reforms  
FORMULATION OF CURRICULUM  
Frequency\_Buddhist  
Frequency\_Burgher  
Frequency\_Christian  
Frequency\_Hindu  
Frequency\_Islam  
Frequency\_Muslim  
Frequency\_Sinhala  
Frequency\_Tamil  
GOALS OF HISTORY TEACHING  
GOALS\_Build up present/design future  
GOALS\_Compare and develop  
GOALS\_Correct mistakes  
GOALS\_Instill pride about the country  
GOALS\_Learn about ethnic group  
GOALS\_Learn about past rulers  
IMPACT OF HISTORY TEACHING  
IMPACT\_Desired  
IMPACT\_Real  
INCLUSION OF CONTENTIOUS ISSUES  
INCLUSION\_#Anti  
INCLUSION\_#Pro  
INCLUSION\_Challenges and methods  
INCLUSION\_Opinions on disenfranchisement of ITs  
INCLUSION\_Opinions on divide and rule

INCLUSION\_Opinions on Sinhala Only Act  
 INCLUSION\_Opinions on standardization  
 INCLUSION\_Opinions on transformation of Tamil demands  
 LAND SETTLEMENT PATTERNS  
 LAND\_Arrival claims  
 LAND\_Homeland other  
 LAND\_Homeland Sri Lanka  
 NATIONALITY\_Muslim/Tamil Muslim  
 NATIONALITY\_Sinhalese/Sinhalese Buddhist  
 NATIONALITY\_Sri Lankan  
 NATIONALITY\_Sri Lankan Muslim  
 NATIONALITY\_Sri Lankan Tamil  
 NATIONALITY\_Tamil  
 PED\_#Alternative methods  
 PED\_#Lecture method  
 PED\_Challenges and methods of teaching history  
 PED\_Identity formation  
 PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH  
 PORT\_#Inequality Justified  
 PORT\_#Less about minorities  
 PORT\_#Less about Muslims  
 PORT\_#Less about Tamils  
 PORT\_Common representation  
 PORT\_Diff:Outsiders  
 PORT\_Diff:Positive & negative  
 PORT\_Diff:Superior & inferior  
 PORT\_Equal representation  
 PORT\_Insufficient about all groups  
 PORT\_Insufficient about minorities  
 PORT\_More about S/B/SB  
 PORT\_Sufficient  
 PORT\_Translation issues  
 PORTRAYAL OF ETHNIC GROUPS  
 QUOTE\_Acceptance  
 QUOTE\_Anti racism  
 QUOTE\_Maturity  
 QUOTE\_Misinformed  
 QUOTE\_Well informed  
 SELF DESCRIPTION  
 SELF\_With ethnicity/religion  
 SELF\_Without ethnicity/religion  
 SOURCES OF HISTORY\_School  
 TEXT\_Critical thinking & interpretation  
 TEXT\_Nation building  
 TEXT\_Portrayal of ethnic groups  
 TEXT\_S:Communal representation  
 TEXT\_S:Disenfranchisement of ITs  
 TEXT\_S:Favourable position of Tamils  
 TEXT\_S:Sinhala Only  
 TEXT\_S:Standardisation and quota system  
 TEXT\_S:State-aided colonisation  
 TEXT\_S:Universal franchise  
 TEXT\_Sensitive issues  
 TEXT\_Values  
 TEXTBOOK ANALYSIS

## Appendix H

### Network diagram



## Appendix I

### Query Report

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HU: Phd Research Study\_04March2016

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Document filter:

"\*Youth & LocationMullaitivu"

3 Quotations found for query:

"CAUSES\_Education related"

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**P10: Mullaitivu\_youth\_16Lokesh.docx - 10:10 [the main reason the war starte..] (68:68)  
(Super)**

Codes: [CAUSES\_Education related - Family: CAUSES OF ETHNIC CONFLICT]

No memos

the main reason the war started was the rating for the education.. for the universities and the students..

**P13: Mullaitivu\_youth\_19Diyan.docx - 13:12 [So I think er.. it started wit..] (66:66)  
(Super)**

Codes: [CAUSES\_Education related - Family: CAUSES OF ETHNIC CONFLICT]

No memos

So I think er.. it started with this er.. the rating of the people.. the.. when they are taking people into the university..

**P16: Mullaitivu\_youth\_3Niranjan.docx - 16:8 [So he was telling that he has ..] (58:58)  
(Super)**

Codes: [CAUSES\_Education related - Family: CAUSES OF ETHNIC CONFLICT]

No memos

So he was telling that he has heard that the problems started just because of the university entrance where.. just because Sinhala people are majority so lot of people from them attend the university and the minority Tamil people only few people. So they wanted to equalize it.. so like um.. in a way that equal amount of people will be selected from both communities.

## Appendix J

**Cross tabulation table: Youth Nationality data**

	*Youth & LocationAmpara	*Youth & LocationColombo	*Youth & LocationMatara	*Youth & LocationMullaitivu	TOTALS:
NATIONALITY_Muslim/ Tamil Muslim	0	0	0	1	1
NATIONALITY_Sinhalese/ Sinhalese Buddhist	0	6	9	0	15
NATIONALITY_Sri Lankan	15	16	11	6	48
NATIONALITY_Sri Lankan Muslim	4	0	0	0	4
NATIONALITY_Sri Lankan Tamil	1	0	0	11	12
NATIONALITY_Tamil	0	0	0	1	1
TOTALS:	20	22	20	19	81

